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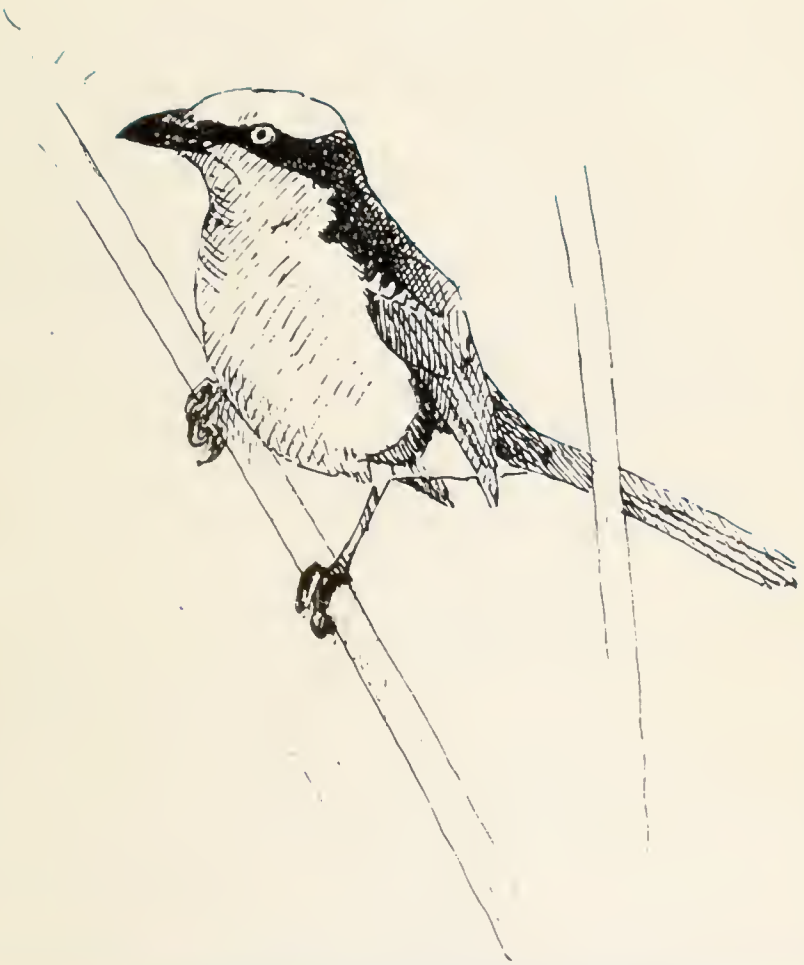

A joint publication of the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya and BirdLife Kenya.

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Editorial

In this issue we focus on the birds of Africa's largest lake — Victoria. This giant aquatic system is home to large numbers of waterbirds. Surveys in Tanzania and Uganda have recently discovered huge breeding colonies of cormorants and terns. As well as the birds of the open water, a unique and specialised set of species lives only in the papyrus swamps that fringe the lake. Yet — as is widely realised — the lake is in trouble. Among other things, it is suffering from pollution, overfishing, destruction of native fish species by the introduced Nile Perch — and now a plague of Water Hyacinth. This pestilential South American weed grows at a phenomenal rate in the warm waters of Victoria. It is inflicting great economic and environmental damage, sometimes in unexpected ways. For instance, big areas of papyrus swamps are now being cleared in Kenya because the weed prevents fishermen from fishing — so they are turning to cultivation instead. The Lake Victoria region is not visited by birders as much as it deserves: we hope the articles here will encourage people to go and see this very interesting part of Kenya for themselves.

A short editorial update. Despite our best efforts, this issue is again late... thanks to all subscribers for their patience. Joseph Oyugi is taking a year's break as Editor while finishing his Master's degree; Colin Jackson will be holding the fort, with special responsibility for our Records section (and for a small explosion of birding jargon). Any bits of the magazine that aren't attributed are written by the Editors. Astute readers may notice that more scientific names than usual are creeping in. Editorial policy is still to use only English names (those on the standard green EANHS checklist) for Kenyan birds. But, with birders still becoming used to the new list, we've included scientific names where there might otherwise be some confusion.

Our next issue focuses on the Taita Hills: dare we hope it won't be quite as delayed?

Good birding! — *The Editors*

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News from Kenya and abroad

Department of Ornithology

How long will it take for us to lose biodiversity?
It seems obvious that when forest is destroyed, biodiversity is lost. However, such extinctions do not happen immediately — there is a time lag between deforestation and species extinction. It is extremely important for conservationists to ask how long this time lag is, so that they can know the species and areas in most urgent need of protection. To date, very little research has been carried out towards answering this question.

The Ornithology Department has begun a collaborative project with the University of Tennessee (USA) to assess how long it has taken for Kenyan bird species to become locally extinct following deforestation. This research will comprise the PhD dissertation of Thomas Brooks, of the University of Tennessee. Our study sites are the mid-altitude rainforest of Kakamega and the montane forests of Mt Kenya and the Taita Hills. Throughout 1996, a joint Museums/Tennessee team will carry out surveys in the remaining forests in these areas to determine how many bird species now remain in each fragment *(see articles below)*. We will compare the resulting totals with the numbers of species found to have been present by past surveys.

Meanwhile, using data from old aerial photographs and from recent LANDSAT satellite images, Robert Honea of Oak Ridge National Laboratory (USA) and Robert Peplies of East Tennessee State University (USA) will measure how much these forests have shrunk over the last century. Combined with the results of the bird surveys, these data will allow us to determine the time that it has taken for the old number of bird species to decline to a lower level, as the forests have been cleared.

This research is being funded by a National Geographic Society Research Award to Stuart Pimm of the University of Tennessee. The grant will also enable two Kenyan ornithologists from the Department to visit Tennessee in 1997 and help analyse the project's results.

To help with our compilation of bird species lists, we would be greatly appreciative if anyone with unusual and unpublished records from Kakamega, Taita Hills or Mt Kenya could send these, with as much supporting data as possible (especially, where exactly the bird was recorded), to the address below. All such help will be fully credited! — *Thomas Brooks and Edward Waiyaki, P O Box 40658, Nairobi*

ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
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South Nandi for the chop

The forest survey team (Edward Waiyaki, Patrick Gichuki and Titus Imboma) ventured out again in the second and third week of May 1996, for an IBA survey of South Nandi forest in western Kenya. This forest was until recently connected to Kakamega forest, the only real tropical rainforest in Kenya. Now they are separated by agricultural land, the gap between them varying from a few hundred metres in parts to several kilometres. The aim of the survey was to document the present avifauna of the forest and assess its general condition and status.

As earlier workers had found, the avifauna is very similar to that of Kakamega Forest, but with an added montane element — South Nandi is somewhat higher than Kakamega (see Ornithology Research Report No. 28, available from the Dept. of Ornithology). We recorded one globally Vulnerable species, Turner's Eremomela, one regionally endangered species, Southern Hyliota, and many other species of regional concern. The eremomelas were encountered frequently, as were the Blue-headed Bee-eaters — a scarce bird in East Africa. Our observations suggest that South Nandi is a major stronghold of Turner's Eremomela, and thus is of great international importance.

The size of South Nandi forest has greatly diminished since the 1980s, partly because of the degazettement of hundreds of hectares at Bonjoge. Much forest was also destroyed when a 10 km power line was connected between Kobujoi and a water treatment site in the forest. Other major problems facing the forest are commercial, mechanised logging of indigenous hard and soft wood, by Rai Sawmills. Incredibly, considering there is a Presidential ban on such activities, logging in the forest is a daily activity, as we observed during the survey period. Illegal pit-sawing and charcoal burning, especially close to the villages on the north-west, also poses a serious threat to the forest. South Nandi is at real risk of being destroyed in the next few years — perhaps its listing as a globally Important Bird Area will help focus attention on this neglected site. — *Edward Waiyaki, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Papyrus in peril

Oliver Nasirwa led surveys of papyrus swamps along the Kenyan shoreline of Lake Victoria, from 21-29 March (with James Wachira) and 15-24 August (with Peter Njoroge). The first survey covered the shoreline from Dunga in the Winam Gulf to River Sio, taking in Koguta, Dunga, Usoma, Usare, Kagwel, Kombudho, Lake Sare, Lake Kanyaboli and Sio Port. The second trip covered the shore from Kusa at the mouth of River Nyando south to Mihoro, looking at Kusa, Koguta, Kendu Bay, Thethra Beach and Aneko.

Papyrus is not nearly as extensive around the lakeshore as previous reports had suggested, and many of the existing stands are being destroyed — especially

close to Kisumu. All the papyrus endemics were recorded, although some (such as Papyrus Yellow Warbler and Papyrus Canary) just from one or two sites. The largest remaining tracts of papyrus are at Lake Kanyaboli/Yala Swamp, stretching westwards to the lake. Lake Sare is the second biggest area — between them, these two sites contain more than 90% of the papyrus in the Kenyan part of Lake Victoria, and are thus crucial for the conservation of papyrus endemics. Sio Port, Dunga, Kusa and Koguta all also contain stands of papyrus big enough to be significant for conservation, and all these sites are likely to qualify as Important Bird Areas.

Outlook blue for threatened swallows

A survey of Blue Swallow sites in western Kenya has yielded depressing results — not a single bird was seen and almost all the suitable sites are on the verge of disappearing under cultivation.

The Blue Swallow *Hirundo atrocaerulea* is a most attractive bird — slender, glamorously glossy-blue all over, and with very long tail streamers in the male. It is an intra-African migrant that breeds in upland grasslands near streams from South Africa to Tanzania. Much of its breeding habitat has disappeared under cultivation and forest plantations, and the bird is listed as globally Vulnerable.

Blue Swallows spend the non-breeding season, from around April to September, in patches of moist grassland in eastern Zaire, Uganda and western Kenya. A small patch of flooded grassland near Mungatsi, in Kenya's Busia District, is known to house a roost of up to 100 of these scarce birds.

From 14-16 July 1996, Oliver Nasirwa and Peter Njoroge of the Ornithology Department, National Museums of Kenya, made a survey of potential Blue Swallow sites in Busia, including Mungatsi. They also spent time at Mungatsi to count the roosting swallows. The only hitch? Not a single Blue Swallow appeared. Mungatsi itself, a patch of flooded grassland alongside the River Sio, is being encroached on by maize plantations, is heavily grazed by livestock, and has reportedly been divided up into small plots for sale. A few patches of suitable grassland occur elsewhere in the district, but all of these are apparently on the verge of being turned over to cultivation. Population densities are high in this part of Kenya, and cultivable land is under intense pressure.

The Blue Swallow has been recorded from just one protected area in Kenya — Ruma National Park. Nasirwa and Njoroge visited the park on 21 August 1996 and found a good quantity of apparently suitable grassland remaining — but again no swallows.

Moist grassland is a vanishing habitat in Kenya, and these sites support many unusual birds (including a number that are regionally threatened) besides, potentially, Blue Swallows. It may not be too late to try and protect Mungatsi and similar small grassland patches — but time is definitely running out.

In search of the Shoebill

The Shoebill *Balaeniceps rex* that last year visited Masai Mara, Amboseli and — astonishingly — Nairobi National Park, resulted in an interesting piece of correspondence. Clement Tiong'ik wrote to inform us that he had several times seen the bird in the Kimondi Swamp, near his home in Nandi District. Although he did not have specific dates and details of the sightings, the possibility that this spectacular, near-threatened bird might occur regularly in Kenya was too interesting to ignore. Thus in July 1996, Oliver Nasirwa and Peter Njoroge spent three days at Kimondi in search of the Shoebill.

Kimondi Swamp (0°17'42"N, 35°04'96"E) lies at 1,800 m and is formed on the floodplain of River Kimondi, which flows south to join with River Sirua and form the Yala River. It covers an area of about ten square kilometres, mostly thickly covered with papyrus and reeds. It is the only large swamp left in the area: others that are shown on the old topographical maps have long since been drained or converted to agriculture.

During their visit Nasirwa and Njoroge walked all around the swamp and talked to many local people. They failed to locate any Shoebills, but it became clear that the bird is familiar to those who live around the swamp. The bird seems to appear periodically, rather than remaining in Kimondi all year round. Peter and Hazel Britton reported similar information from the Yala Swamp in 1969, before much of the swamp was destroyed by a drainage scheme, but the Shoebill has never been located there.

The Shoebill needs a large home range, and Kimondi is probably only big enough to support between two and four individual birds. However, as one of the last sizeable remaining wetlands in the area, it is a very important site and in need of serious conservation attention.

Forest birds of the Cheranganis

In February and March 1996, the forest survey team (Edward Waiyaki, Patrick Gichuki and Titus Imboma) turned its attention to the Cherangani Hills. In the last week of February we made a reconnaissance visit to assess the threats to the forests and select a good patch for an intensive survey. The forests we visited included Kipkunurr, Sogotio, Kapolet, Kiptaberr and lastly Kapkanyar. Kapkanyar seemed to be the least disturbed area and logistically suitable for our purpose.

In general, the forests on these hills appeared in relatively good shape. Nonetheless, various forms of forest destruction have been going on, mainly selective logging, charcoal burning, felling of large trees by honey collectors (who also occasionally cause forest fires), grazing of livestock (a serious problem in the dry season in some areas), and, worst of all, complete forest clearing for

agriculture purposes by squatters. Some parts of the forests have also been de-gazetted for settlement.

According to the District Forest Officer, Marakwet District, Mr. David K. Muia, the problem of squatters was rampant in Embobut forest. Apparently, the squatters are hostile to any outsiders who show interest in their forest, especially ones in a Landrover. This effectively barred us from visiting — not only does our team travel in a Landrover, we carry binoculars and wear green raincoats, more or less guaranteeing a hostile reception. The forest guards must be armed when patrolling this area.

Our survey showed that the forests have a rich avifauna, composed of a mixture of montane and western (Guineo-congolian) species (see Ornithology Research Report No. 27, available from the Department). Among the more interesting species was Splendid Starling *Lamprotornis splendidus*, which, according to J. Barnley, is a breeding visitor to this area around April-May (this record was in March). We added three new bird atlas square records for square 37C and nine for 37D, plus a number of new breeding records.

The Cherangani Hills are likely to qualify as a Globally Important Bird Area, based on the representation of African Highland Biome species (50 out of the 63 in Kenya), the size and condition of the forests. In any case, the hills have an immense potential for ecotourism, for visitors to the west and north-western part of the country. The landscape is beautiful, with undulating hills, dense forests, cascading rivers and natural grasslands that could be developed for camping. This is not to mention the rich flora and fauna, including large mammals such as the Bongo which was sighted twice during the survey. — *Edward Waiyaki, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Parasitic pursuits

Bernard Achero, an MSc student at the University of Nairobi, has begun work with the Department on a study of blood parasites in fourteen families of birds in Kenya.

Parasites are a very important but largely hidden factor in determining the survival, reproductive success and behaviour of birds. We know very little about them. Achero will be working with the Nairobi Ringing Group to take blood smears from a selection of bird species, identify the parasites that are present and assess the intensities of infection.

As part of the Department's collaborative work with the National Avian Research Centre, Abu Dhabi *(see elsewhere in this issue)* Achero will also spend ten days at NARC later this year for training in parasitological techniques.

As the Marsh Warbler flies: Kenyan and Hungarian ringers forge links

In early August 1996, the Department was delighted to welcome Gábor Lövei for a short visit to discuss links with a ringing station in Hungary. Given that Gábor actually works in New Zealand, and as an entomologist, this may sound a little unexpected. For the last 14 years, however, he has been closely involved in a long-term ringing project at the Ocsa Landscape Reserve near Budapest in Hungary. Two Kenyan birdwatchers, Jennifer Oduori and Jeam Agutu, visited Ocsa (pronounced 'Oh-cha') last year to take part in the programme, as part of a Fellowship scheme supported by Earthwatch Europe. Out of this came the idea of a link with Kenya's main ringing station at Ngulia *(see Kenya Birds 4(2)).*

Most of the migrants passing through Kenya come from eastern, not western Europe. We know relatively little about the migration system on this side of the two continents. Hungary is likely to be on the migration path for many birds that come to Kenya — in fact, an Ngulia-ringed Marsh Warbler was recovered there earlier this year! A link between Ocsa and Ngulia thus makes sound biological sense — and it may allow several interesting scientific projects to take off. For example, detailed studies have been made at Ocsa of the wing shape of migrant species. These show that in some species a number of distinct populations pass through, presumably from different parts of eastern Europe and Russia. Similar measurements at Ngulia would provide much useful information on migration timing. Using genetic methods, with DNA from blood samples, we can check how well the wing measurements really correspond to population differences. Thus, ringing data from Ocsa and Ngulia could eventually provide a powerful and effective way of monitoring bird populations across an enormous area of the Palaearctic..

The immediate step is now to try and extend the existing Earthwatch project at Ocsa to encompass Ngulia as well. All going smoothly, this may happen in 1997. Volunteers provided by Earthwatch will help with the many tasks associated with the ringing programme, and provide some financial support for Kenyan ornithologists to take part. In any case, the links between Ngulia and Ocsa are rapidly being cemented — five more Kenyan ringers have had the chance to visit Hungary this year, courtesy of Earthwatch, while one will visit a satellite project in Italy.

Secrets of the akalats revealed

Research Associates Erwin Nemeth and Paul Matiku *(see Kenya Birds 4(2))* have wound up their field work on the East Coast Akalat *Sheppardia gunningi,* and begun to analyse the data.

In January and February 1996, Nemeth and Patrick Gichuki made brief surveys of the species in the Shimba Hills and the East Usambaras, Tanzania.

The akalats were still present in Mkongani Forest on the Shimbas, where a previous survey had located them in 1992. However, Longomagandi Forest, where the species had been very conspicuous in 1992, now held no akalats at all. The forest has been badly damaged by elephants, and this seems likely to have rendered the habitat structure unsuitable for the akalats. Maluganji Forest was also visited — the team found that the elephant damage here was very severe, much worse than in 1992. Maluganji is now part of a Community Wildlife Sanctuary set up to preserve the elephants, which unfortunately seem intent on destroying their forest environment.

Densities of the akalat in the East Usambaras and Mkongani were comparable to those in the *Cynometra* woodland of Arabuko-Sokoke. These forests are much smaller and more fragmented than Sokoke, however, so undoubtedly support a smaller population overall.

Matiku's analysis of the bird's distribution in Sokoke has revealed some clear habitat preferences. On a broad scale, the birds are absent from parts of the mixed forest where there has been considerable cutting of trees, and where the canopy density is therefore reduced. Thus their patchiness in the mixed forest seems to be a direct result of human disturbance. The birds occur rather evenly throughout the *Cynometra*, but their local density there (and in the parts of the mixed forest where they occur) is closely tied to the density of mossy logs. The birds show fine-scale preferences for places where there is dense vegetation at 2 m height, and deep litter cover.

Overall, there may be more than 9,000 pairs of akalats in Sokoke — although there is considerable uncertainty still about these estimates. Several conclusions are clear, though: Sokoke is probably the most important single site for this bird, and within Sokoke the *Cynometra* forest is of key importance for its survival. Although estimates of its numbers should now be revised upwards, the akalat must still be regarded as threatened. The Sokoke studies show that it cannot adapt easily to habitat change. The bird probably occurs in substantial numbers only in Sokoke and a handful of sites in Tanzania. Its survival depends on these forests remaining in good condition — or on recreating patches of suitable habitat. Recently Neil Baker has discovered the species breeding in an artificial 'forest' of Mvule trees, planted 40 years ago on the Rondo Plateau in Tanzania. It will be interesting to see how the habitat structure here compares with that required by the bird in Sokoke.

At the Sharpe end

Luc Lens and Muchai Muchane have completed their work on Sharpe's Longclaw on the Kinangop Plateau. Luc has been coordinating monthly counts of longclaws in selected plots, to understand their distribution in relation to the

available habitat. Muchai has been looking in more detail at the birds' behaviour, movements and habitat choice *(see earlier issues of Kenya Birds).*

The studies have already yielded some interesting results. The Kinangop Plateau is a mosaic of different types of grassland interspersed with *Eucalyptus* plantations and (rapidly expanding) cultivated fields. Sharpe's Longclaw likes grassland with tussocks, probably because these provide good cover for the birds when they are foraging or nesting. Cattle do not eat tussock grass, however, so more and more farmers are ploughing up these areas and reseeding them with different grass species — which the cattle then graze down to the ground. Also, as the cultivated fields and plantations expand, the remaining grassland patches are becoming ever more isolated from each other. Both these factors are causing the numbers of longclaws to decline. If Sharpe's Longclaw can move easily between small grassland patches, it may be able to persist in Kinangop. Otherwise, its future looks uncertain. We have little information yet on the species' population dynamics and dispersal ability, so our understanding of the effects of grassland loss is not complete. Nonetheless, there is a clear need to conserve and manage the species' remaining habitat. Since almost all this land is privately owned, keeping viable populations of Sharpe's Longclaw will be much easier said than done.

Regional Red Data list steams ahead

East Africa now has a regional Red Data list for birds — the first regional list on the continent (and probably world-wide) to use the new IUCN categories of threat *(see Kenya Birds 4(2), pp 54-55).*

The list was completed during a regional workshop hosted by the East Africa Natural History Society (Uganda) in Kampala from 14-18 March 1996. Participants went through a draft list, discussing each species and taking a final decision on the threat status to assign.

An initial version of the list has now been produced in the Department's Research Reports series (no. 23). In all, 107 species are listed as regionally threatened — 4 are Critical (the highest category), 18 Endangered and 85 Vulnerable. Another 104 species are regarded as Near-threatened. Species that are not threatened, but for which the East African region has special responsibility, make up another 87 in total. Kenya has 73 regionally threatened birds, Tanzania 74, Uganda 64, Rwanda 45 and Burundi 30. Having a large number of threatened birds is nothing to boast about — while it shows the importance of our avifauna, it also shows that we urgently need to do something about conserving it! It is hoped that the list will focus attention on key bird species and prompt conservation action to improve their status.

Copies of the report (16 pages including a detailed Introduction) can be obtained from the Department of Ornithology at KSh 100/= each.

How long will it take for us to lose biodiversity? — in Kakamega

As part of the collaborative Ornithology Department/University of Tennessee project to assess the time lag between forest destruction and bird extinction, a team comprised of Thomas Brooks (University of Tennessee), Titus Imboma (Ornithology Department) and David Gitau and Silvester Karimi (Nairobi Ringing Group) spent six weeks of April and May 1996 in Kakamega, carrying out forest bird surveys. Ornithology Department staff Joseph Oyugi and Edward Waiyaki also joined in with the fieldwork for a week each.

We covered the main block of Kakamega forest plus five adjacent forest fragments. These were, to the south, the Yala River and the Ikuywa River (which are now wholly separated from Kakamega proper by plantations and glades); and to the north, Kisere forest (part of the Kenya Wildlife Service reserve) and the two halves of Malava forest, east and west of the Webuye-Kakamega road. We carried out extensive surveys and standardised mist-netting at all sites. In all we recorded a total of 136 forest species (out of the 194 resident forest species known from Kakamega), of which we mist-netted 53.

As expected, the smaller fragments which have been isolated for a longer period held considerably fewer species of birds. For example, sensitive forest species such as Black-billed Turaco and Yellow-bellied Wattle-eye were only found in Yala, Ikuywa and Kakamega itself, while more tolerant species like Blue-headed Bee-eater and Turner's Eremomela were found to be surviving in Kisere. In the long-isolated Malava forests, even common species like Olive-green Camaroptera and Pale-breasted Illadopsis have become extinct.

Meanwhile, the analysis of forest cover data, which will be used to assess how the number of bird species in each fragment has shrunk as the forests have been fragmented over the last century, is continuing apace at Oak Ridge National Laboratory (U.S.A.). Robert Peplies, one of the experts organising this analysis, visited Kenya in March, to obtain new imagery and to visit one of the other study sites, Mt Kenya. This will be our last site for ornithological fieldwork, following on from our surveys of the Taita Hills *(see below). — Thomas Brooks, P O Box 40658, Nairobi*

How long will it take for us to lose biodiversity? — in the Taita Hills

In July and August, the Museums/Tennessee bird team studying the time lag between forest destruction and bird extinctions visited the Taita Hills. Our team now consisted of Thomas Brooks and Christine Wilder (University of Tennessee), John Kageche (Ornithology Department), David Gitau and Silvester Karimi (Nairobi Ringing Group) and Roger and Jim Barnes (volunteers from the UK). Luc Lens, Edward Waiyaki and Colin Jackson from the Ornithology Department joined the group for some of the work. We carried out extensive

surveys, standardised mist-netting, and surveys of vegetation structure and composition in a total of nine forest fragments.

The once-extensive forests of the Taita Hills have now been reduced to tiny mountain-top fragments in three biogeographical units. According to our aerial photos, the first of these units, the area around the town of Wundanyi, held unfragmented forest even as recently as the 1960s. Throughout July we surveyed the five main forest patches in this area, Ngangao, Mwachora, Chawia, Fururu and Vuria. Of the three Taita Hills endemic birds, Taita White-eye *Zosterops (poliogaster) silvana* remains common even in tiny fragments of forest and Taita Apalis *Apalis (thoracica) fuscogularis* survives in forest edge in most of the patches, but Taita Thrush *Turdus (olivaceus) helleri* requires well-shaded forest, now left only in Ngangao and Chawia, to persist. These two relatively large forests (for Taita!) also still hold scarce species such as Crowned Eagle, Orange Ground Thrush, and two notable starlings, Abbott's and Sharpe's. However, only a very few forest birds, such as Olive Sunbird, survive in the small fragments.

The second area that we covered was Sagalla, the hill to the south-east of Voi, separated from the rest of the Taita Hills by the low plains of Tsavo. On Sagalla, where a tiny strip of natural forest remains within a pine plantation, we found none of the Taita Hills birds typical of Ngangao. Instead there were a number of coastal species including Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher and Peter's Twinspot, plus the rare Grey-olive Greenbul.

Finally, we surveyed Mbololo, in the eastern half of the Taita Hills, separated from Ngangao by a deep valley. Mbololo holds more than half of the area's remaining forest in a single fragment. This beautiful and rugged forest retains most of the Taita species, including large numbers of thrushes, although surprisingly the apalis is not present here. In addition, several of the coastal species are present in the lower portions of the forest.

Although the Taita Hills forests are now tiny and none has any protection beyond gazettement as a Forest Reserve, the Forest Department, happily, is doing an efficient job of protecting them. This is an essential task, as any further deforestation will lead to no less than the global extinction of the three Taita endemics. — *Thomas Brooks, Luc Lens and Edward Waiyaki, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

The fundamental things...

Bird tourism in Kenya is growing rapidly and bird guides are looking for training. The Department has now organised a short certificate course for professional guides (and others who are interested!), called 'Fundamentals of Ornithology'. The objective is to improve the participants' understanding of birds and their birding skills. The inaugural course took place from 5-10

February 1996 in the tranquil setting of Elsamere Field Studies Centre, Lake Naivasha. The eleven participants, most of them sponsored by their employers, proved highly enthusiastic and kept their lecturers (Department staff Colin Jackson, Leon Bennun and Edward Waiyaki) on their toes. Field trips to Hell's Gate and Kieni Forest, for savannah and forest birds, helped fill in several gaps, as did extra lectures and field sessions given by Luc Lens and raptor expert Simon Thomsett.

Participants judged the course a great success, so much so that we decided to repeat it in short order for those who couldn't take part the first time. Round Two shifted to the Masai Mara, where we were based at Mara River Camp from 12-18 May 1996. The 22 participants, who included five Tanzanians, came from as far away as Mombasa, Kakamega, Arusha and Moshi. Trainees and trainers alike again found it an enjoyable and educational week, helped along by the fine facilities and tranquil surroundings of Mara River.

The Department would like to thank Elsamere, Hell's Gate National Park, East African Ornithological Safaris and Don Turner for their assistance, and the NMK Audio-Visual Department for allowing us to fly in delicate A-V equipment to the Mara!

Next year's 'Fundamentals of Ornithology' is scheduled for 20-25 April 1997, at Delamere Camp, Elmenteita. The all-inclusive course fee will be in the region of KSh 15,000. Anyone interested in taking part should contact Colin Jackson at the Ornithology Department. Don't wait too long — places are limited!

Ringing the changes

As well as its monthly visits to Wasaa Conservation Centre. the Nairobi Ringing Group has recently been ringing birds at Hopcraft's Ranch, Athi River, Lake Magadi and southern Kajiado. Around 57 waders were caught at Magadi, mainly migrants such as Little Stints and Curlew Sandpipers — an exciting experience for the group. A trial attempt to capture Sharpe's Longclaws, as part of the ongoing study of this threatened species on the Kinangop Plateau, met with success; two birds were caught in walk-in traps and wing-tagged on 18 April 1996. Subsequent attempts, unfortunately, were foiled by gale-force winds that almost swept away the traps and presumably kept the longclaws huddled under a tussock somewhere.

Student round up

Research Associates Munir Virani and Brooks Childress (both PhD students at the University of Leicester) continue their work at Naivasha on Augur Buzzards and Great Cormorants, respectively. Brooks' cormorants have been obliging

enough to breed again this year in a big colony at Oloidien, so he is now winding up his observations and preparing to analyse the data. Benard Mburu is also at Naivasha, working in and around Hell's Gate on the ecology of the Egyptian Vulture. A sad initial finding is that the danger to vultures from poisoning is very real — one of Mburu's nesting females was found dead outside the park together with several Tawny Eagles. They had apparently fed on bait laced with cattle-dip. Mburu will be registering for his MSc at the Wildlife Management Department, Moi University, this October.

Meanwhile, Joseph Oyugi (Wildlife Management, Moi University) has begun his study of Kakamega birds. He will be looking at bird populations in the main forest and in fragments. This work complements the Department's project looking at how long it will take us to lose biodiversity (see above), which focuses on the species rather than the population level. Kiptoo Kosgey (Environmental Studies, Moi University) starts work in September on the ecology of the threatened Turner's Eremomela in South Nandi Forest. Alfred Simiyu (Wildlife Management, Moi University) will be moving to Kajiado to look at how sandgrouse use waterholes — the idea is to establish a reliable monitoring system for these gamebirds, based on waterhole counts.

Au revoir, LL

In September the Department bids farewell to Luc Lens, who has been with us for two years under the auspices of VVOB (Flemish Office for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance). Luc, who is taking up a post at Antwerp University, has contributed a huge amount to the Department during his stay. There is no doubt that we are going to miss him greatly. The good news is that Luc will continue working with the Department in a research project on the Taita Hills forests, and will probably be back in Kenya for several months each year.

New Landrover on the horizon

The Department's Landrover, a pre-TDI diesel affectionately called 'Ground Hornbill' has proved a wonderfully reliable field vehicle. However, it is ageing and becoming expensive to keep on the road — and, as its name suggests, it is painfully slow on long field trips. Now, following the granting of exemption from duty, we are excitedly awaiting the arrival of a new Landrover. This very generous donation comes from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and will greatly extend our mobility. We now have to think up an appropriate name...

Great Cormorant — *John Gale*

BirdLife Kenya

Festival of Birds

Last year's Bird Day evolved into this year's Festival of Birds, held on Saturday 29 June at the Louis Leakey Hall, National Museums of Kenya. The Festival continues a series of public events intended to increase awareness of Kenya's rich birdlife and the conservation problems it faces. A varied programme had something for just about everyone. Despite a slow start ("There's still nothing in the nets!") the bird ringing demonstration proved popular: a White-browed Coucal, the first to be captured at the Museum, obligingly flew into the nets just as a large school group turned up. Peter Davey gave riveted listeners a visual tour around Kenya, accompanied by superb bird slides. The indefatigable crew demonstrating how to make 'origami' paper birds was kept busy folding from morning until later afternoon. Colin Jackson's Bird Trivia Quiz was fiendishly difficult in places (do *you* know how many feathers there are on the head of a sparrow?), but ended up informing and enlightening even the 'experts'. The highlight of a fine set of videos was perhaps the delightful film, 'Bird Nuts: The Magnificent Obsession' — in which it turned out that Kenyan bird guru Don Turner played a cameo role. Over everything soared Simon Thomsett's amazing life-size papier-mache Lammergeier, drawing attention to efforts to reintroduce

this magnificent bird in Hell's Gate National Park. Many thanks to all who turned out for the day, and to the RSPB and Swarowski Optik for respectively sponsoring the event and newspaper publicity.

Kenya Wetlands Working Group

Count totals fail to rise

The annual waterbird counts took place in January 1996 and covered no fewer than 26 wetlands: Lakes Magadi, Naivasha, Elmenteita, Nakuru and Bogoria, swamps in Amboseli and smaller sites around Nairobi. Overall totals, at around 450,000 birds, were down from last year, mainly because of the low numbers of Lesser Flamingos. Nakuru was still almost dry. Numbers of other birds in the central Rift Valley were stable from last year, but still at very low levels. (In case counters are confused, a computer glitch meant that the totals circulated in the summary report were, unfortunately, incorrect.) The six-year data show a discouraging declining trend in most major groups.

Financial support this year came from the Kenya Wildlife Service Wetlands Programme and the British Development Division in Eastern Africa. Thanks to these organisations and to the volunteer counters who continue to give up their weekends in a good (and usually fun) cause.

Waterbird work-out

The waterbird counts have now been taking place regularly since January 1990. More than 500 people have been involved, and about 100 are now regular counters. To improve the skills of the volunteer participants, and to discuss how the organisation of the counts could be improved, the Department of Ornithology and KWWG organised a special training workshop for waterbird counters on the weekend of 22-23 June 1996. Around 50 people took part in the first day's session, which involved a look at the data collected over the past six years (worryingly, most waterbirds have shown a persistent decline in numbers), and sessions on identification and counting techniques. In the afternoon, smaller groups met to discuss particular topics and returned with useful recommendations. On Sunday morning, the group made an outing to Dandora Sewage Treatment Works in the east of the city. Dandora doesn't sound like the world's most attractive venue, but waterbird counters see things through different eyes. The settling and oxidation ponds are home to a wide diversity of birds and an excellent place for training. On this occasion, big flocks of ducks and grebes offered good practice in estimating numbers, and in how to use a 'scope and binoculars properly.

Flamingos in the mist

The annual mid-year waterbird count at Lake Nakuru took place on 6-7 July, with more than 680 volunteers turning up. The weather was not ideal — it poured with rain on the night of 6 July, and in the morning the lakeshore was a sea of mud, the lake was shrouded with mist and the flamingos totally invisible! Once the mist cleared, everything went well and more than 200,000 flamingos were counted. Lesser Flamingos are highly mobile, and low numbers at Lake Nakuru in recent months have been the cause of much comment and controversy in the press. The present numbers represent a spectacular (but predictable) return to a more 'normal' situation.

International

Kenya tops the world in 'NTT World Bird Count'

As part of last year's World Birdwatch event, the Japanese telecommunications giant NTT offered to donate $10 to bird conservation for every species of bird seen across the world *(see volume 4(2), pp. 60-61).*

The total number of reported species was 2,764, and BirdLife International accordingly received a total of $27,640 last December for its bird conservation efforts.

Although clocking up large numbers of species was not our main aim in Kenya, we nonetheless managed a list of 541 over the course of the World Birdwatch weekend. Those who took part will be interested to know that this was, by a long stretch, the highest total for any country in the world. Runners-up were the United States, with 460 species, and Zimbabwe, with 439.

The next World Birdwatch will take place on 4-5 October 1997. However, NTT will sponsor 'World Bird Count' again this year, from 28 September to 13 October inclusive. Any birds recorded within that period, and reported to the organisers, will once more earn $10 for bird conservation.

BirdLife thrives at 75

BirdLife International is 75 years old on 22 June 1997. The world's oldest international conservation organisation will be using the anniversary to concentrate attention on the serious threats facing birds across the world. One important event will be the third World Birdwatch on 4-5 October 1997. Watch this space!

A new D/C-E in Cambridge

After an international search, Michael Rands, formerly Deputy Director, has been appointed the new Director/Chief Executive of BirdLife International. He

replaces Christoph Imboden, who left earlier this year after more than a decade at the helm. Christoph was responsible for BirdLife's development into a vibrant international Partnership with more than a million members (through Partner organisations) throughout the world. His successor faces the challenge of consolidating this Partnership and making it into an even more effective force for global biodiversity conservation.

Forty-five years on: Congo Bay Owl rediscovered in Itombwe

One of Africa's most obscure birds, the Congo Bay Owl *Phodilus prigoginei*, has been rediscovered in the Itombwe Forest, eastern Zaïre. The only record up until now has been a specimen shot in Itombwe in 1951 by a bird collector working for Alexander Prigogine. The species is particularly interesting as its only close relative, the Oriental Bay Owl *P. badius*, occurs far away in India and south-east Asia. Some other highly unusual Itombwe birds, like the African Green Broadbill *Pseudocalyptomena graueri,* show similar Oriental affinities — an indication of ancient links between Africa and India.

The rediscovery was made by a survey team led by John Hart, Agenonga Upoki, Ndera Bagurubumwe and Tom Butynski. On 1 May the team was working near Kabembwe, in the south-east corner of Itombwe, when they captured a small owl in a mist-net. It was ringed and released. Photographs sent to the Royal African Museum in Tervuren, where the type specimen is held, confirmed that the bird was indeed the mysterious Congo Bay Owl. The Ornithology Department has copies of the photographs, courtesy of Tom Butynski, which show a beautiful bird patterned in rich chestnut, buff, black and white.

This capture extends the owl's known range by about 95 km to the south. At 1,830 m, the altitude of the new record is about 600 m lower than the first one. Itombwe is a patchwork of forest, grassland, bamboo and bush, and the area where the bird was captured lies in between montane forest and grassland, and has been extensively disturbed by people.

It appears as though the owl may prefer areas of grassland close to forest — the type specimen was found asleep in a grassy glade! And it can evidently tolerate at least some human disturbance of its habitats. However, the discovery reinforces the significance of Itombwe, generally considered the most important forest for bird conservation in mainland Africa. No part of Itombwe has any protected status, and pressures from the surrounding population (which includes many refugees from Rwanda and Burundi) are rapidly increasing.

Identification first aid... Lake Victoria 'specials'

Leon Bennun
P. O. Box 40658, Nairobi

Lake Victoria, the world's second-largest freshwater lake, looks very impressive on the map. In geological terms, though, it is a mere rain puddle. Only 120 m or so deep, and perhaps as little as 30,000 years old, Victoria is scarcely in the same league as the ancient, almost fathomless lakes of the western Rift, like Tanganyika and Malawi.

As far as evolution goes, Victoria has been around for the mere blink of an eyelid. Nonetheless, it has (or had, until the introduction of the justly infamous Nile Perch) an amazing diversity of endemic fish species. In one of the textbook examples of adaptive radiation, the different species of Lake Victoria cichlids had mouths specialised for almost any purpose you could imagine — from grazing algae to sucking out someone else's mouth-brooded offspring (the original 'kiss of death').

The lake's birds are nothing like as unusual as its fish. Nonetheless, and perhaps surprisingly, Victoria's basin forms a small avian 'biome' all of its own, with a suite of characteristic species whose distribution is centred on the lake. Most of these are associated with lake-shore vegetation and, in particular, the dense stands of papyrus that are a feature of many parts of the lake.

I deal with six of these birds here, namely White-winged Warbler, Papyrus Yellow Warbler, Carruther's Cisticola, Papyrus Gonolek, Northern Brown-throated Weaver and Papyrus Canary. All these are genuine papyrus birds. Another four species (Greater Swamp Warbler, Swamp Flycatcher and the Yellow-backed and Little Weavers) are less restricted in range and/or habitat, but are hard to find in Kenya except around Lake Victoria's shores.

If you have struggled with the greenbuls, cisticolas and swifts in previous issues of *Kenya Birds*, identifying lake-shore birds around Lake Victoria ought to be a piece of cake. And so it generally is — if you know what to look (or listen) for. Habitat is obviously very revealing. If you see a canary in papyrus, there is a good chance that it is *the* Papyrus Canary. But it might not be: some species are confusing, and non-swamp birds are increasingly turning up where they shouldn't be, as more and more swamp habitat is destroyed. And *of course*, as a good birder, you should never jump to conclusions...

White-winged Warbler. Pretty straightforward, really. This is a large, long-tailed warbler with a conspicuous (and distinctive) white patch in the carpal area of the wing. The wing coverts are also tipped white, while the underside is pale

with heavy streaks on the throat and sides of the breast. This is a common bird in dense papyrus stands, but hard to see since it creeps about low down near the water. It is, though, a noisy species with a loud and far-carrying voice: Zimmerman, Turner and Pearson (ZTB) describe this well as "a succession of short, loud notes... starting slowly, accelerating, then fading away" — a common sound of the lake-shore.

Greater Swamp Warbler. Not quite so simple. However, even a brief view will hint that this is an *Acrocephalus* warbler (one of the swamp or reed warbler group). Note the dull colours (drab brown above, brownish-grey below), strong legs, slim appearance, angular head and long, slender bill. So far, so good. However, the very similar, more widespread Lesser Swamp Warbler also occurs in papyrus around Victoria. The best feature to separate them is size: the Greater is usually a lot bigger (as the name might hint!) and it has especially large, strong feet and toes. The whole lower mandible of the noticeably long bill is often pale, rather than just the base as in the Lesser Swamp Warbler. Should the bird obligingly open its mouth for your inspection, you're laughing: the inside is dull yellow, not the Lesser's startling bright orange. Their voices also differ. Both make a series of rather random notes separated by pauses, but the Greater's tone is rather harsh, with lots of churrs and gargles, while the Lesser's song includes many musical notes and is clearer and higher-pitched. The song you may have heard at Naivasha is that of the Lesser Swamp Warbler — despite popular, and durable, belief to the contrary, the Greater does *not* occur there.

Papyrus Yellow Warbler. An enigma wrapped inside a mystery might just about describe this threatened species *(see elsewhere in this issue)*. We know almost nothing about its habits, and there seems to be no recording of its call. Luckily, it is reasonably easy to identify. It resembles the ordinary Yellow Warbler, which could occur at lake-edge habitats too. However, the Papyrus version lacks the contrasting dark crown and is washed a pretty rufous on the wings, rump, tail, flanks and under tail coverts. Overall, it looks and behaves rather like a yellowish swamp warbler. If you manage to identify this species positively, please do send in the record.

Carruther's Cisticola. The confusion species here is the Winding Cisticola, which occurs all around the lake shore but not usually in the middle of dense papyrus beds. Carruther's, on the other hand, is a real papyrus specialist. Both belong to the 'large and streaked' group of cisticolas, with heavy dark streaks on the back and contrasting brighter crowns and wing panels. There are several subtle differences, though. The Winding has the tail feathers grey or rufous,

depending on age and season, with blackish 'sub-terminal' spots (i.e. just above the tail tip) and whitish tips. Carruther's has a uniformly blackish tail with a pale tip. The wing panel in Carruther's is a rather dull brown, not bright rufous as in Winding. Carruther's also has a darker, chestnut-coloured, not rufous-brown crown, but this can be hard to assess. If you have a good look, the relatively fine, slender bill of Carruther's is a giveaway. Carruther's also has a very different song to the characteristic reeling trill of Winding; it is a "chatter followed by a rapid series of high scratchy or squeaky notes" (ZTB). Although not always easy to see, Carruther's occurs in most sizeable papyrus stands around the lake and is a very characteristic Victoria bird.

Swamp Flycatcher. If you see a dumpy little brown and white flycatcher, a bit like a chunky version of the Dusky, that perches on low vegetation near the water, it will be this species. Its white throat, bordered by a dull brown chest band, gives it away immediately. Not a shy bird, although it does nothing to announce its presence, and generally one of the easier lakeside species to find.

Papyrus Gonolek. Gonoleks are relatives of the boubous and, like them, make loud bell-like whistles. The common Black-headed Gonolek is black above and bright red below. So is the present species, but it additionally has a dull golden-yellow crown and some white spotting on the wing coverts. The crown of the immature is duller than the adult's, but not black as in the Black-headed Gonolek. A common and noisy species in the right habitat — dense papryus stands.

Swamp Flycatcher — *Brian Small*

Northern Brown-throated Weaver. The best feature on the adults of this waterside weaver — both males and females — is the distinctive pale eye. The male is a mainly yellow bird with a greener, lightly streaked back and a dark chestnut face

and throat. The female is rather dark greenish-brown, streaked above, with a very small black patch around and in front of the eyes. Since the males have no non-breeding plumage, this bird is usually easy to identify. The Orange Weaver, recorded elsewhere around the lake but rarely from Kenya, also has a pale eye, but the male is mainly orange-yellow and lacks the chestnut colour on the face; its bill is pale brown, not black. The female is greenish above and mainly dull white below, also with a pale eye and bill.

Northern Brown-throated Weavers may nest in trees, shrubs or papyrus at or near the lake edge. The nest itself (a good identification feature in many weavers) is rather small and rounded, with the merest hint of an entrance tube.

Yellow-backed Weaver. A weaver with a black head, chestnut underparts and a yellow back. What could be more distinctive? Beware: there are two different species that look like this, and both frequent the lake shore. The breeding male of the more widespread Jackson's Golden-backed Weaver has a bright golden-yellow back, is bright chestnut underneath, and has the black on the head extending right on to the nape: it looks very clearly tri-coloured. The Yellow-backed, despite its name, has a greenish-yellow back, so that the bright yellow forms only a narrow collar between the back and the black head. The chestnut underparts are duller, and the black of the head does not descend to the nape. Overall, the effect is more 'smudged' and less contrasting.

There are some more subtle differences too: Jackson's has a bright red eye, the Yellow-backed a dark one; the upper mandible of Jackson's is nearly straight, while that of the Yellow-backed shows a distinct downward curve.

That's the breeding males. Out of season, things become a bit harder. The bill shape is still useful. Apart from that, female or non-breeding male Jackson's are generally rather bright, quite green above and yellow below, with only a faint wash of chestnut on the breast. By contrast, the Yellow-backed is rather dark, brownish above with a dull chestnut wash on the chest and flanks. The male Jackson's retains its red eye in the non-breeding season too.

Both these species build rather similar nests — onion-shaped, with no entrance tube — and may occur in mixed colonies in reeds or trees overhanging the water.

Slender-billed Weaver. A small waterside species, with a characteristic long, slender bill — almost more like a warbler's than a weaver's. The greenish-yellow female does, in fact, look and behave very much like a rather chunky warbler. The male has the usual yellow-and-black weaver colours, the black confined to the front two-thirds of the head and tapering to a point on the upper chest. The Little Weaver could be mistaken for this species, but usually avoids the lake-

shore and has a short, stubby bill. Slender-billed Weavers build neat, small, compact nests with a short but obvious entrance tube, usually over water.

Northern Brown-throated Weaver — *Brian Small*

Papyrus Canary. Another true papyrus specialist, and perhaps the trickiest of all these species to identify with confidence. It is exceedingly similar to the grey-faced western race *(brittoni)* of the African Citril. However, while the citril has a rather long, straight-edged bill (at least by canary standards), the bill of the Papyrus Canary is noticeably short and stubby, with a strongly down-curved upper mandible. Compared to the citril, the male Papyrus Canary is also brighter yellow below, and less streaked on the flanks and breast. The citril probably rarely ventures into proper papyrus, but it is certainly likely to be seen around the lake-shore, so care is needed — especially if you are more used to seeing the black-faced citrils of the Kenya highlands.

More name games: two major confusions in van Perlo...

Colin Jackson
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The new *Birds of eastern Africa* by Ber van Perlo is a tremendous asset to the field identification of birds in East Africa. However (as has been pointed out in the various reviews) a number of discrepancies and errors have come to light as the book has been tested in the field. These include mistakes in the illustrations, text and maps, but there have also been major complaints about the common

names used, often very different to those familiar to East African birders. True, a lot of taxonomic work has been done since the day that J.G. Williams first wrote his *Birds of East Africa* and several species have been lumped and others split (and some even lumped and then split again or vice versa...). Even so, many of the names he has used (based on the 1990 checklist by Short, Horne and Muringo-Gichuki) are different for reasons other than widely recognised taxonomic changes.

Here I just want to point out a couple of the most confusing differences to the latest list of Kenyan bird names produced by the East Africa Natural History Society (*Check-list of the Birds of Kenya*, 3rd edition, Nairobi, 1996). This list is considered to be the authoritative Kenyan list and all bird names used in *Kenya Birds* are taken from it.

The first confusion relates to the species which Williams (*Field guide to the birds of East Africa*, 1963, 1980), Britton (*Birds of East Africa,* 1980), Lewis and Pomeroy (*A bird atlas of Kenya*, 1989), Zimmerman *et al.* (*Birds of Kenya and north-eastern Tanzania*, 1996) and the EANHS Checklist all refer to as the Red-headed Weaver *Anaplectes rubriceps.* In van Perlo (plate 90.20) it is given the common name of "Red-headed Malimbe". Unfortunately, in all the other publications mentioned there already exists a Red-headed Malimbe, *Malimbus rubricollis*. Van Perlo calls this species the Red-collared Malimbe (plate 90.16). Thus, when using van Perlo, one should read:

Red-headed Malimbe as Red-headed Weaver and,
Red-collared Malimbe as Red-headed Malimbe.

The 'real' Red-headed Malimbe is a forest species confined to Kakamega, while the Red-headed Weaver is a widespread savannah species.

The second confusion concerns two species which in the 1996 EANHS Checklist are called Yellow-rumped Seedeater *Serinus reichenowi* and Black-throated Seedeater *S. atrogularis.* Before going into details, let me give you a little bit of taxonomic history. If you look in Williams (1963, 1980), Britton (1980), and Lewis and Pomeroy (1989), you will find no reference to a Black-throated Seedeater. There is, though, a Yellow-rumped Seedeater with the scientific name *S. atrogularis.* This species was considerd to have two races in Kenya, *S. a. somereni* and *S. a. reichenowi.* Since then, further studies have revealed that the commoner, more widespread Kenyan race, *S. a. reichenowi*, is different enough to other forms to warrant the status of a full species. This has therefore been called the Yellow-rumped Seedeater *S. reichenowi* (both taxa in fact have yellow rumps!) and *S. atrogularis* has been given the common name of Black-throated Seedeater (the specific name comes from the Latin *ater* meaning black and *gularis*, throated).

In Kenya, *S. reichenowi* ('Yellow-rumped') occurs mainly in the southern half of the country where it is "fairly common from sea level to 2000 m, mostly in low, dry areas with scrub, bush, open woodland and cultivation" (Zimmerman 1996). *S. atrogularis* is a much rarer bird "only known from Kakamega, Siaya and Sioport, where now scarce or overlooked" (Zimmerman 1996).

Now back to van Perlo. The confusion sets in when he gives the Yellow-rumped Seedeater *S. reichenowi* the name Reichenow's Serin, taken from its scientific name (plate 96.9). This would not be so bad had he not then called the Black-throated Seedeater *S. atrogularis* the Yellow-rumped Serin (plate 96.8). What is even more confusing is that both the maps given for these species are completely wrong. The one for *S. reichenowi*, rather than showing it occurring throughout most of southern Kenya, indicates that it doesn't occur in Kenya at all but only in Ethiopia! Likewise, the map for *S. atrogularis* shows it not just in western Kenya and Uganda, but throughout almost the whole of Kenya. So the maps further confuse matters rather than clarifying them. Thus, when using van Perlo, one should read

Yellow-rumped Serin as Black-throated Seedeater and,
Reichenow's Serin as Yellow-rumped Seedeater.

You have been warned!

Records

compiled by
Colin Jackson
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This section exists for the rapid publication of interesting observations, and contributions are welcomed. If you are sending in records for Kenya Birds, please consider the following guidelines. For breeding records, send in cases of confirmed breeding, i.e. birds incubating eggs or feeding nestlings/fledglings. Records for confirmed breeding are useful for ALL species, even the most common ones; records of nest-building, courtship etc. are only needed for rare species or ones where there are few breeding records. Interesting records will be published here and the others stored by the EANHS for analysis of breeding seasons, success rates, habitat requirements etc. You are strongly urged to fill in a Nest Record Card at the same time. Much more detail can be recorded on a card, and if your record can be added to the card collection then it is of permanent value. Cards can be obtained free of charge from the EANHS Nest Record Scheme Organiser (see back page). A report listing records submitted to the scheme is published every second year in the Annual Bird Report of *Scopus*.

For other records of Afrotropical, oceanic and Palaearctic birds, please send in any observations and notes that you think are of interest (e.g. earliest/latest dates for Palaearctic/ Intra-African migrants, unusual records for your area). The Editors will select records for publication according to the space available. For all records, including breeding records, please be precise as possible about dates and location. If you have sightings from places not easily found on the map, please take the trouble to give the latitude and longitude of the site to as much precision as you can (preferably the nearest second of arc or better). This will allow us to use these as we update the Bird Atlas of Kenya by computerised bird distribution records.

Supporting details and descriptions are always welcome for unusual records and will improve the chances of publication (see *Kenya Birds* 4 (2), p. 84 for suggestions on how to submit a record). Records of certain species are requested for inclusion in the *Scopus* Annual Bird Report (the third issue of Scopus each year). Species of interest to *Scopus* are indicated in the new *Check-list of the Birds of Kenya* (EANHS 1996) and records should be sent to Don Turner (P O Box 48019, Nairobi). For particularly unusual sightings supporting details (i.e. field notes, photographs etc.) will be needed for scrutiny by the Ornithological Sub-committee Rarities Panel.

Key to records

New atlas square records are indicated in brackets. All records are from 1996 unless otherwise indicated.

Codes are: pres, present (first record); post pres, present (first post-1970 record); prob, probably breeding; conf, confirmed breeding; post conf, confirmed breeding (first since 1970); e.g. {pres, conf 25B} indicates that the species is present and confirmed as breeding in square 25B.

Where scientific names are not stated here (and elsewhere in Kenya Birds) the English names follow the *Check-list of the Birds of Kenya* (3rd edition), EANHS, Nairobi 1996.

Overview

Since the last issue of *Kenya Birds* there have a good number of interesting and unusual records including a number of firsts. Perhaps the most startling was the African Pitta that flew into a window of the Safariland Hotel, Naivasha, at night to be found by Peter Chirchir in the morning. This is the only record for this species this year, the first inland record for many years and the first ever for the Rift Valley. The date in June corresponds well with previous records of this elusive intra-African migrant, most of which have also been birds that have struck lit windows at night. Among the lucky people able to 'twitch' this stunning bird was Brooks Childress who sent us a beautiful photograph of it which is now on display in the Department. Despite having hit a window, the bird flew off strongly when released. Another interesting record is the second recent observation of Clarke's Weaver, a Kenyan endemic, outside the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest in the Dakacha woodland to the north. Very little is known about the movements of this species, excpet than it seems to disappear from the forest at times — and no-one knows where it breeds! Surveys in the Taita Hills have turned up no less than

26 new atlas square records including some rather uexpected ones such as the Grey-olive Greenbul and Abbott's Starling. The starling, a threatened bird, is another of those species that we know very little about. The birds seen may well be from the population on Mt. Kilimanjaro, which isn't that far away... as the starling flies. In Kakamega Forest some light has been shed on the breeding biology of the attractive Blue-headed Bee-eater. This has never before been documented in East Africa; indeed, only four nests have ever been described from anywhere in its range. Other exciting news from Kakamega is the pair of Grey Parrots that were seen almost daily by Titus Imboma on the southern edge of the forest — the first records received by us for several years. Note must be made of the checklist that Richard and Anne Bishop submitted to us from a site on the floor of the Kerio Valley near the Flourospar mine which included no less than *13* new atlas records for QSD 49B — and from just 3 hours birding!

As far as Palaearctic migrants are concerned, there were some spectacular movements of birds reported during the northerly migration. One of the most amazing was around 300 Common (Steppe) Buzzards moving steadily north along with about 30 Lesser Kestrels, 2 Booted Eagles, 20-30 White Storks, 30-40 Abdim's Storks, a probable Amur Falcon, and a Lanner (which was possibly a resident bird), all over Moi University's Chepkoilel Campus to the east of Eldoret in March. Also sighted at the same time were 200+ Barn Swallows, some 200 Common House Martins, around 100 Eurasian Swifts, a Spotted Redshank, several other migrant waders and Eurasian Marsh Harrier — truly impressive! Other hot news fresh from the field is the first Willow Warbler to have been reported on 17 September (the advantage of a delayed publishing of this volume of *Kenya Birds*!) and the most gripping record of late, an immature Long-toed Stint seen at the magical Sabaki River mouth — only the tenth record for Kenya!

Do send in any records you have, particularly any first and last dates of migrants seen, both Palaearctic and intra-African or any unusually large or impressive movements of birds. We are keen to publish information of this kind.

Breeding Records

Many thanks go to all those who have sent in Nest Record Cards over the past six months or so. A total of 165 cards have been submitted of which 139 were confirmed and 26 probable breeding records. These cover 102 species (87 confirmed, 24 probable) and were submitted by 32 contributors. Those people who sent in 5 or more cards deserve special congratulations. They were: Fleur Ng'weno — 26 cards, Titus Imboma — 6, James Wainaina — 20, Peter Chirchir — 6, David Mutinda — 16, Muchai Muchane — 6, John Coburn — 12, Erwin Nemeth — 5, Neil Willsher — 7

A new batch of Nest Record Cards has been very generously printed for us by Brooke Bond (K) Ltd and are available upon request (see above).

Ostrich: nest with 20 eggs on flood plain near Kampi ya Samaki, 2/1, JC — *good to have records of this species breeding outside National Parks though whether the nest survived is not known*

Egyptian Vulture: 2 nests with one chick each, Hell's Gate, Sept. '95, BMC — *one nest at least again in 1996, but adults were poisoned during August*

African Goshawk: [conf 101A] juvenile being fed by adults, Ronge Juu Forest, Taita Hills, 13/8, RB

Shikra: adult on nest in an Acacia, Kampi ya Samaki, Baringo, 28/12/95, JC

Great Sparrowhawk: [conf 101A, 101B] active nests in Chawia and Sagalla Forests, Taita Hills, July/Aug, THP

Augur Buzzard: 3 nests containing 2 eggs or chicks each destroyed by children, Nandi Hills, April, KK

Palm-nut Vulture: [conf 114A] Sable Valley Wildlife Sanctuary, Shimba Hills, 9/10/95, FA

African Crowned Eagle: [prob 101A] pair watched building nest, displaying and copulating, Chawia Forest, Taita Hills, 23/7, RB, CJ, LL, JeL

Lanner Falcon: female on nest incubating with male displaying nearby, Kampi ya Samaki, Baringo, 28/12/95, JC

Spotted Thick-knee: [conf 50A] 2 eggs in a nest (adult shot on nest with bow and arrow by children), West Bay, Kampi ya Samaki, Baringo, 28/12/95, JC

Heuglin's Courser: 2 nests with 1 egg each — in one case the egg was broken by children and in the other, the adult was shot on the nest with a bow and arrow, West Bay, Kampi ya Samaki, Baringo, 30/12/95 and 1/1, JC

Black-headed Plover: 2 nests with eggs being incubated, West Bay, Kampi ya Samaki, Baringo, 29/12/95, JC

African Skimmer: incubating adult on nest, Ileret, L.Turkana, June, EJN

Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse: 2 nests with 3 eggs each, West Bay, Kampi ya Samaki, Baringo, 20/12/95 and 4/1, JC — the first bird was shot on the nest with a bow and arrow and then eaten

African Green Pigeon: nest with eggs, Homa Lime Co., Koru, 28/3, NW

Brown Parrot: young being fed in nest, Homa Lime Co., Koru, 8/3, NW

Red-chested Cuckoo: juveniles fed by African Pied Wagtail (Buyangu, Kakamega Forest, 18/2, CG) and Rüppell's Robin-Chat (Peponi Gardens, Nbi, 4–25/5, JH, M&LN)

African Emerald Cuckoo: Juvenile fed by Black-headed Oriole, Crescent Island, Naivasha, 16/8/95, ML

Klaas's Cuckoo: juveniles being fed by Bronze Sunbird (NMK, 20/1, CJ), Grey-capped Warbler and African Paradise Flycatcher (both Upper Hill, Nbi, August, FN)

Diederik Cuckoo: juvenile fed by Baglafecht Weaver, Upper Hill, Nbi, Jan, FN

White-browed Coucal: young being fed by adult, Ridgeways Estate, Nbi, 27/12/95, FN

White-faced Scops Owl: [conf 48C] a recently fledged juvenile only just able to fly caught in shamba near Mumias and brought to NMK, 22/8. *This bird was brought overnight on a bus from Mumias and delivered to the Department. Fortunately it was in good form and has found a temporary home with some foster parents in the Melepo Hills until it will be old enough to fend for itself. This record is particularly interesting as it is only the second confirmed breeding record for this species in Kenya*

Pearl-spotted Owlet: recently fledged juvenile with adult, Loldia Farm, Naivasha, 1/3, JW

African Wood Owl: recently fledged young with 2 adults, Ngong Road Forest, Nbi, 24/2, FN, CMG

Blue-naped Mousebird: nest with 2 eggs, Kampi ya Samaki, Baringo, 2/1, JC

Malachite Kingfisher: juvenile being fed by adult, Nbi River, NMK grounds, Nbi, 12/10/95, CJ

Blue-headed Bee-eater: 2 nests watched with adults taking food to young, Buyangu,

Kakamega, 10-21/2. Children seen throwing stones at birds. Juvenile birds seen being fed by adults on three occasions in different localities in Kakamega Forest, 25/4, 15/5 and 16–18/8, TI

Broad-billed Roller: [conf 114A] Sable Valley Wildlife Sanctuary, Shimba Hills, 9/10/95, FA

White-headed Wood-hoopoe: up to 3 adults bringing food to nest hole, Loldia House, Naivasha, 21/10/95, JW

Grey-throated Barbet: adults carrying food into 2 nests, Isecheno, Kakamega Forest, 16/2, TB

Red-and-yellow Barbet: [conf 4C] nest with 3 eggs in termite hill, Ileret, June, EJN

Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird: 2 young seen in nest and later fledged, Plains View Estate, Nbi, 11/7, AI

Yellow-spotted Barbet: juvenile, hardly able to fly, seen Buyangu, Kakamega Forest, 17/2, TB

Angola Swallow: nesting under roof of a classroom, Rutere Primary School, N. Kinangop, 3/4, FMK

African Pied Wagtail: Observed feeding juvenile Red-chested Cuckoo, Buyangu, Kakamega Forest, 18/2, CG

Mountain Wagtail: [conf 61C] young being fed, Arroket Dam, Sotik, 4/4, I&PF

Grassland Pipit: nest with 2 eggs, 26/2 and one with 3 eggs 27/2, Heni, S. Kinangop, MM. *The second nest was robbed by a boy who put the eggs under a brooding hen — he wanted to rear the chicks when they hatched*

Sharpe's Longclaw: 2 young watched through to fledging, Heni, S. Kinangop, 24/4–8/5, MM

Black-lored Babbler: 3 young watched through to fledging, Lake Naivasha Hotel, 24/11–7/12/95, CR

Northern Pied Babbler: [conf 63A] 2 chicks rescued from children and replaced in nest, Wajee Camp, Mihuti, Mukurweini, 5/2, DM

Broad-tailed Warbler: adult carrying food and displaying, Buyangu, Kakamega Forest, 4/5, CJ, LL

Grey-capped Warbler: feeding a juvenile Klaas's Cuckoo, Upper Hill, Nbi, 13–18/8, FN

Jameson's Wattle-eye: nest with 2 young, Malava Forest, Kakamega, 29/4, TI

Brubru: [prob 62C] 2 adults building nest in top of an *Acacia xanthophloea*, Lotus Island, L. Naivasha, 5/5, SD

Cape Rook: [conf 62D] 2 young being fed in nest, Heni, Kinangop, 19/12/95, MM

Black-bellied Starling: [conf 102D] 2 juveniles being fed by adults, Fumbeni, Kilifi, 2/1, LD

Grosbeak Weaver: [conf 63A] adult feeding recently fledged young, Wajee Camp, Mihuti, Mukurweini, 5/2, DM

Black-headed Weaver: [conf 61A] c. 30 nests watched from building through to fledging, Koru, Jan–Apr 1996, NW

Chestnut Weaver: [conf 62C] adult carrying food, Loldia Governor's Camp, Naivasha, 18/6, PM

Red-headed Weaver: [prob 61A] 1 pair nest-building among Black-headed Weavers, Koru, 5/12/95, NW

Zebra Waxbill: male displaying, Carnivore 'Biodiversity Park', Nbi, 19/6, FN

Other records: Afrotropical species

Little Grebe: single bird "half swimming, half walking" in stream at bottom of gorge in Hell's Gate NP. Later taken and eaten by an Augur Buzzard, 17/1, JW

Great Cormorant: [pres 51C] on small dam, Borana, Timau, 14–16/2/95, NW

Common Squacco Heron: [pres 51C] on small dam, Borana, Timau, 14–16/2/95, NW

Black-headed Heron: [pres 49B] Kerio Valley near Fluorspar mine, 8/10/95, R&AB

Abdim's Stork: 100+ soaring westwards over Maseno School, 21/1, JA; 30–40

moving north amongst large number of Palaearctic migrant raptors and storks, Moi University Chepkoilel Campus, Eldoret, 18/3, LL, PN, CJ, EW, JO, TB

Greater Flamingo: flock of 5 flying south over Tiwi beach, Oct. 1995, FH

Maccoa Duck: 1 at Dandora Sewage Ponds, Ruai, Nbi, 8/4, CJ

African Swallow-tailed Kite: 6 sheltering in *Acacia xanthophloea* from a soda dust storm at south end of Lake Nakuru NP on 14/1 (I&HM). The origin of these birds is not easy to determine. They may have originated from the breeding grounds in the Turkana region or from the small breeding population around Mt Suswa (though no breeding has been documented there since 1990). The movements of this species are not well understood

Black-chested Snake Eagle: adult over Buyangu Hill, the first documented record for Kakamega Forest, 14/2, TB

Brown Snake Eagle: [post pres 61A] a single bird at Homa Lime, Koru, 31/12/95, NW

African Marsh Harrier: 1 hunting at dusk, Dandora Sewage Ponds, Nbi, 3/8, JeL, DG, GE, CJ

Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk: Adult in Tigoni, 6/8, LL. *A good record of this relatively little-known bird*

Mountain Buzzard: [pres 101A] recorded from Ngangao, Chawia, and Mbololo Forests, Taita Hills, July/Aug, THP

Tawny Eagle: a melanistic bird seen over the Narok road, Rift Valley floor, 7/7, LL, WSC

Steppe Eagle: [pres 102B] observed during survey of Brachystegia woodland north of Sabaki River, 14-17/11/95, TMB, DNg, CDS

African Hawk-Eagle: [pres 49B] Kerio Valley near Fluorspar mine, 8/10/95, R&AB

Crested Guineafowl: [pres 51C] group seen in wooded valley, Borana, Timau, 14–16/2/95, NW; [post pres 101A] party of c.10 birds in dry scrub on Voi-Ronge road, 16/8, THP

Common Button-quail: 1 flushed beside road, Game Ranching Ltd, Athi River, 15/6, ST, CJ

Buff-spotted Flufftail: 1 heard at Udo's Camp, Kakamega Forest, 9/2, JO, TB

African Water Rail: present at 'Splash' wetland, Langata, Nbi, 3-8/8, DR

Grey Crowned Crane: 250-300 together, 1km from Malaba/Kitale junction west of Eldoret, 19/11/95, DB

Greater Painted-snipe: pair seen on dam, Borana, Timau, 14–16/2/95, NW

Collared Pratincole: flock of 200+ roosting on ground, Amboseli NP, 5/4, DB

Bridled Tern: daily offshore, esp. late afternoon (max. count, 28 in an hour) off Watamu, 21–25/8, RB

African Skimmer: 3 seen L.Naivasha, 3/6, TP; single bird present, Lake Jipe, 26/9, LL, VH

Tambourine Dove: [post pres 101B] recorded Ngangao, Sagalla & Mwabira Forests, Taita Hills, July/Aug, THP

Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon: in forest on the Shimba Hills, 29/6/95, FA. *These records correlate with the few observations of this species in coastal forests that are thought to be non-breeding visitors attracted by fruiting trees.* Ngong Forest, 31/7, JeL, GE; Nbi Arboretum, 18/8, FN; a female caught and ringed at NMK, 17/8, NbiRG. *A smattering of sightings in and around Nbi during July/Aug correspond with the altitudinal movements that this generally highland forest species is thought to make*

Lemon Dove: [post pres 101A, pres 101B] fairly common in Ngangao, Chawia, Sagalla, Mwabira, Ronge and Mbololo Forests, Taita Hills, July/Aug, THP

Grey Parrot: 2 birds seen almost daily flying north in the mornings and south in the evenings over Isecheno, Kakamega Forest, 30/7–19/8, TI. *This is a very encouraging record — it was thought this species was now locally extinct in Kenya, there not having been a record for several years. It is quite likely that these birds came in over the border from Uganda where they are not uncommon in certain areas. We trust they will not succumb to trapping.*

Black-and-white Cuckoo: single bird, Langata, Nbi, June '95, NW

Levaillant's Cuckoo: an individual bird feeding in garden, Homa Lime, Koru, 31/11/95, NW; single bird, Loldia Farm, Naivasha, 25/7, JW

Thick-billed Cuckoo: seen in *Brachystegia* woodland north of Sabaki River, 14-17/11/95, TMB, DNg, CDS. *Represents a minor range extension of this uncommon species along the Sabaki River*

Red-chested Cuckoo: 1 heard calling Ndara Ranch, Voi, 6/1, MR. *The first record for the ranch and right on the edge of the species' known range in Kenya*

Yellowbill: 1 foraging in thick vegetation beside entrance to City Park car park, Nbi, 15/9, FN. *Very unusual, though not the first record, for Nbi*

White-browed Coucal: 1 present and singing by Nbi River, NMK grounds from 28/3 to 20/6, NbiRG

Marsh Owl: 1 flushed from Nderit Marsh during July Waterfowl Count, L.Nakuru NP, 7/7, CJ

Slender-tailed Nightjar: [pres 49B] Kerio Valley near Fluorspar mine, 8/10/95, R&AB

Scarce Swift: 2 seen low over Chawia Forest, Taita Hills, 21/7, RB

White-rumped Swift: [pres 102B] *Brachystegia* woodland north of Sabaki River, 14–17/11/95, TMB, DNg, CDS

Red-fronted Tinkerbird: [pres 61A] feeding in acacias along wooded stream amongst sugarcane, Homa Lime, Koru, 31/11/95, NW

Brown-breasted Barbet: [post pres 101A] Taita Hills, July/Aug, THP

Scaly-throated Honeyguide: [pres 49B] Kerio Valley near Fluorspar mine, 8/10/95, R&AB

Red-throated Wryneck: 4 individuals displaying in Jacaranda trees, Homa Lime, Koru, 31/12/95, NW; 1 by Nbi River, NMK grounds, 28/3, CJ

Green-backed Woodpecker: [pres 48D] 1 seen forest edge below Buyangu Hill, Kakamega Forest, 17/2, TB, JK

Bearded Woodpecker: Tigoni, Limuru, 18/5, SD. *An unusual high-altitude record of this irregularly recorded species.*

African Broadbill: adult seen Kwale Forest, Shimba Hills, 27/8; 3 calling Salazar 'B' site, Kakamega Forest, 8/9, RB

African Pitta: [pres 62C] found when stunned after hitting a window of Safariland Hotel, Naivasha at night. Found by PC and photographed by BC before being released unharmed, 28/6. *The first inland record of this enigmatic and almost legendary intra-African migrant for many years. A gripping photograph of the bird in cracking plumage is on display in the Ornithology Dept.*

Banded Martin: [pres 102B] observed during survey of *Brachystegia* woodland north of Sabaki River, 14-17/11/95, TMB, DNg, CDS

Grey-rumped Swallow: 20-50 along Narok road, Rift Valley floor, 7/7, LL, WSC

Sokoke Pipit: *Brachystegia* woodland north of Sabaki River, 14-17/11/95, TMB, DNg, CDS

Little Grey Greenbul: 1 on Mukangu Trail, Kakamega Forest, 15/2, TB

Grey-olive Greenbul: [pres 101A & 101B] not uncommon in forest along streams at 1,200-1,500 m in Sagalla, Mwabira & Ronge Forests, Taita Hills, July/Aug, THP

Cabanis's Greenbul: a wanderer ringed in *Eucalyptus/Lantana*-dominated habitat, NMK grounds, 13/6, NbiRG; [pres 101B] commonly found in Ngangao, Chawia, Fururu, Sagalla, Mwabira, Ronge & Mbololo Forests, Taita Hills, July/Aug, THP

Northern Brownbul: [pres 49B] Kerio Valley near Fluorspar mine, 8/10/95, R&AB

Brown Babbler: [pres 49B] Kerio Valley near Fluorspar mine, 8/10/95, R&AB

White-starred Robin: [pres 101B] common in every forest patch surveyed in Taita Hills, July/Aug, THP

Rüppell's Robin-Chat: [pres 101B] recorded in small numbers Sagalla Forest, July/Aug, THP

White-shouldered Cliff Chat: [post pres 101A] Taita Hills, July/Aug, THP

Little Rock Thrush: 1 individual of this infrequently seen species on Lion Hill, L.Nakuru N.P., 11/8, LL

Ashy Flycatcher: [post pres 101A] a single bird in scrub below Ngangao Forest, 13/7, THP

Southern Black Flycatcher: [pres 49B] Kerio Valley near Fluorspar mine, 8/10/95, R&AB

Lead-coloured Flycatcher: [pres 49B] Kerio Valley near Fluorspar mine, 8/10/95, R&AB; [post pres 101A] Taita Hills, July/Aug, THP

Tiny Cisticola: [pres 50B] Ol Malo Ranch, Rumuruti, 8/10/95, C&RF, A&MD

Black-headed Apalis: [post pres 101A, pres 101B] in small numbers in forest edge, Chawia, Fururu, and Sagalla Forests, Taita Hills, July/Aug, THP

Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher: [post pres 101A, pres 101B] quite common in understorey at Sagalla, Mwabira & Ronge Forests, July/Aug, THP

Black-throated Wattle-eye: [pres 101B] in small numbers, Sagalla Forest, July, THP

Common Fiscal: [post pres 101A] Taita Hills, July/Aug, THP

Three-streaked Tchagra: [pres 50D] 1 mist-netted Mpala Ranch, Jan., JL, MVdV, DN, LM

White-naped Raven: 1 feeding with Pied Crows in Aga Khan Sports Club rubbish pit, Nbi, 23/6, CJ, PN

Abbott's Starling: a female, Kieni Forest, 7/7, LL, WSC; [pres 101A] 3 birds Chawia Forest, Taita Hills, 15-17/7, (RB) and again 3 (males) observed 23/7, LL, EW, VH. *Recent sightings of this little known threatened species have been in the forests south of the Aberdares and on Mt. Kenya; the one record elsewhere in Kenya was on the Chyulu Hills in 1939 by van Someren — these records are therefore particularly interesting and further demonstrate the importance of the last remaining forest patches on the Taita Hills*

Sharpe's Starling: up to 3 birds seen on 18/7, 21/7 and 22/7, in Chawia Forest, Taita Hills, RB, JeL, LL

Olive Sunbird: [post pres 101B] common in Sagalla Forest, July, THP

Golden-winged Sunbird: 3 ringed, NMK grounds between 28/3 and 11/4, NbiRG

Black-necked Weaver: [pres 50B] Ol Malo Ranch, Rumuruti, 8/10/95, C&RF, A&MD

Clarke's Weaver: in *Brachystegia* woodland north of Sabaki River, 14-17/11/95, TMB, DNg, CDS. *This is the second record of this rather enigmatic endemic species in this area, outside the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest where it has always previously been seen. The seasonal nature of observations suggests that it moves around, but how and when are a mystery, and there are still no breeding records — perhaps these woodland patches are where it moves to (and breeds?)*

Red-headed Weaver: [pres 49B] Kerio Valley near Fluorspar mine, 8/10/95, R&AB; female present in Nbi Arboretum, 18/8, FN

Red-collared Widowbird: small flock seen NMK grounds, 4/4, CJ

Green-winged Pytilia: [pres 49B] Kerio Valley near Fluorspar mine, 8/10/95, R&AB

Green-backed Twinspot: [post pres 48D] 1 on forest edge, Mukangu Trail, Kakamega Forest, 14/2, TB; [pres 101B] present in small numbers in Sagalla Forest, July, THP; [post pres 63A] an immature and adult female ringed, Wajee Camp, Mihuti, Mukurweini, 14/9, CJ, TI, PGG

Red-billed Firefinch: [pres 49B] Kerio Valley near Fluorspar mine, 8/10/95, R&AB

Black-cheeked Waxbill: [pres 49B] Kerio Valley near Fluorspar mine, 8/10/95, R&AB

Blue-capped Cordon-bleu: present on Mpala Ranch, Jan., JL, MVdV, DN, LM

Other records: Palaearctic species

White Stork: 200+ moving south, Maseno School, 24/2 and a further 200+ low over trees heading north-east, 3/3, JA; 350+ over Nandi Hills town, 18/3, KK; few dozen moving north along with Common Buzzards, Moi University Chepkoilel Campus, Eldoret, 18/3, LL, PN, CJ, EW, JO, TB

Northern Shoveler: 45 males and 15 females together, Ol Pejeta Dam, Sweetwaters Game Park, 18/2, CH, HB

Osprey: 2 at L. Naivasha, 31/3, SD

Common (Steppe) Buzzard: 300 birds moving steadily northwards over Moi University Chepkoilel Campus, Eldoret, 18/3, LL, PN, CJ, EW, JO, TB

Booted Eagle: pale-phase bird over Nbi-Nak road, Limuru, 5/3, CJ, LL; 2 birds (1 pale, 1 dark-phase) moving north together with Common Buzzards, Moi University Chepkoilel Campus, Eldoret, 18/3, LL, PN, CJ, EW, JO, TB

Eurasian Hobby: 6 seen together, Soysambu Wildlife Sanctuary, Lake Elementeita, 9-10/4, JH, M&LN; 1 catching insects at dusk over Museum building, NMK, 9/4, CJ; 3 catching and eating flying-ants after a storm west of the Ngong Hills, 5/5, SD

Lesser Kestrel: c. 30 birds moving north, Moi University Chepkoilel Campus, Eldoret, 18/3, LL, PN, CJ, EW, JO, TB

Eurasian Oystercatcher: single bird at Sabaki River mouth, Malindi, 12/9, LL, VH

Little Stint: c.30 at Dandora Sewage Ponds, Nbi, 3/8, CJ, JeL, DG,GE

Long-toed Stint: immature present at Sabaki River mouth, Malindi, on 11-12/9, LL, VH. *Only the tenth record for Kenya*

Broad-billed Sandpiper: a remarkable count of at least 74 birds at the usual site, Sabaki River mouth, Malindi, 11/9, LL

Ruff: c. 100 at Dandora Sewage Ponds, Nbi, 3/8, CJ, JeL, DG,GE

Marsh Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper: all present in small numbers at Dandora Sewage Ponds, Nbi, 3/8, CJ, JeL, DG, GE

Spotted Redshank: 1 at University sewage ponds. Moi University Chepkoilel Campus, Eldoret, 18/3, LL, PN, CJ, EW, JO, TB

Lesser Black-backed Gull: 3 on L. Naivasha out from Elsamere, 11/8, CJ, JeL, GE

White-winged Tern: c. 2,500 at Dandora Sewage Ponds, Ruai, Nbi, 8/4, CJ

Eurasian Bee-eater: "last flight seen heading north", Arroket Estate, Sotik, 5/4, I&PF; many around Raganga, Kisii, 30/8, OM; flock heard overhead, Melepo Hills, Kajiado, 6/9, CJ, OM, TI, SK

Barn Swallow: 100+ at Loldia Farm, Naivasha, including probable first year birds, 24/7, JW; 1000+ over L. Naivasha, 11/8, CJ, Jel, GE

Common House Martin: [pres 49B] Kerio Valley near Fluorspar mine, 8/10/95, R&AB; c. 200 together with Barn Swallows moving north, Moi University Chepkoilel Campus, Eldoret, 18/3, LL, PN, CJ, EW, JO, TB

Yellow Wagtail (race *flava*): a late bird at L.Naivasha on 12/5, SD

Tree Pipit: 1 in NMK grounds, 27/3, CJ

Sedge Warbler: 2 ringed NMK grounds, 9/5, NbiRG — *classic dates for this late-returning migrant*

Eurasian Reed Warbler: one singing Dandora Sewage Ponds, Ruai, Nbi, 8/4, CJ; last one ringed at NMK, 13/4, NbiRG

Olivaceous Warbler: single bird, Carnivore Biodiversity Park, 25/2, CJ

Willow Warbler: early returned migrant at Windsor Golf Hotel, Nbi, 17/9, KN

Red-backed Shrike: a male in cracking breeding plumage of the race *pallidifrons* ringed NMK, 11/4, NbiRG; another seen from Orn. Dept. window, 15/4, JF

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Abbreviations: L. — Lake; NMK — National Museums of Kenya; Nak — Nakuru; Nbi — Nairobi; NP — National Park.

Notes

Juvenile Blue-headed Bee-eaters in Kakamega Forest

The habits of the Blue-headed Bee-eater *Merops muelleri* are rather poorly known, possibly because it inhabits rainforest. Although the species is found from Mali to Zaïre, the only populations in East Africa are in Kakamega and South Nandi Forests, and formerly on Mt Elgon. We carried out fieldwork in Kakamega in April and May 1996, as part of a project funded by the National Geographic Society, "How long does it take for us to lose biodiversity?" *(see News, this issue)*. During this fieldwork we had the opportunity to observe three families of Blue-headed Bee-eaters.

We watched two pairs in the Ikuywa River forest, one on 25 and 27 April, the other on 7 May; and one pair in the Yala River forest, on 13 and 15 May. The Ikuywa families were seen on the forest edge, from the road, while the family in Yala was deep inside the forest. Each family consisted of four birds, two adults and two juveniles. This is consistent with the only report of young birds in the literature, of pairs with two nestlings in Cameroon (in *Kingfishers, Bee-eaters and Rollers*, by C. H. Fry, K. Fry and A. Harris). The juvenile plumage was similar to that illustrated in *Kingfishers, Bee-eaters and Rollers*, except that the young birds showed some red on their throats.

We collected data on the foraging success and behaviour of the first Ikuywa family (3 hours) and the Yala family (1.5 hours). In each family, only one adult was visible for most of the time. The other apparently foraged away on its own in the sub-canopy. The two juveniles were more in evidence, often accompanying the visible adult. In each case, it seemed that one of the juveniles was more dependent on the accompanying adult than the other. The adult was only seen feeding one of the juveniles in each family, while the other juvenile was more often observed foraging on its own.

The birds were very active, frequently sallying off their perches to chase insect prey. Adult birds made a total of 18 sallies per hour of observation, juveniles only 11. The adults were more skillful hunters than the juveniles, catching an average of 68% of the prey items that they pursued. The juveniles were only successful in an average of 48% of their hunting sallies. However, 25% (5/20) of the prey items caught by an adult were fed to the more dependent juvenile.

A total of 31% (11/36) of the prey items caught were butterflies, the rest being flies and wasps. The butterflies were always knocked against the bird's perch to remove their wings before being eaten. This behaviour was also observed for several other prey, presumably wasps that were having their stings removed.

In addition to these observations, we were lucky enough to catch an adult Blue-headed Bee-eater when mist-netting on the Isiukhu River Trail in the KWS Forest Reserve at Buyangu on 19 April. The bird was caught in the second to bottom panel of the mist-net, only 20 m deep inside the forest. It had a brood patch, indicating that it was a breeding female.

Finally, Titus Imboma returned to Kakamega (studying Blue Monkeys *Cercopithecus mitis*) later in the year, and on 16, 17 and 18 August observed a group of no less than six Blue-headed Bee-eaters together in forest near the Isecheno guesthouse. The group included two obvious juveniles (with no red on their throats) and one very bright adult. This latest record suggests that Blue-headed Bee-eaters may be co-operative breeders (like many other bee-eater species), perhaps with first broods helping their parents to raise second broods. The breeding biology of the species remains, however, a rich field for further investigation.

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A search for Hinde's Babbler north of Embu

The range of Hinde's Babbler *Turdoides hindei* appears to have contracted markedly in recent years. Plumb (*Scopus* 3(3), 1979) summarised records which extended from Machakos north to Meru, and from Murang'a east as far as Nzui. He estimated that its range in the 1940s had covered approximately 17,500 km^2, but by 1979 he considered it common only within an area of about 1,050 km^2, centred on Embu.

Since this assessment the species has been resighted in many of its old haunts. Adrian Lewis recorded Hinde's Babbler at Machakos in 1983, and more recent work by Peter Njoroge and colleagues has greatly clarified the species' status there (see *Kenya Birds* 3(1)). It has also been resighted at Kitui, and in 1993 was discovered at Mukurweini, Nyeri District, extending its known range to the west side of Mt. Kenya (see *Kenya Birds* 2(2)). However, little is known of the species' current range north of Embu. Although Plumb's 1979 paper includes a record from Meru from 1944, the most northerly record subsequently was from Runyenjes during the 1970s.

During 26-31 May 1996, I carried out a brief search for Hinde's Babbler at Peter Njoroge's study site at Kianyaga near Embu, and then at four sites in the vicinity of Runyenjes and Thuchi River, and in two areas just north of Meru. The area around Kianyaga is intensively cultivated, but with much cover (e.g. *Lantana*) remaining. There, I located four groups with relative ease, all within 1 km^2. Using playback I was able to draw the birds out into the open to age individuals and to check for rings (Leon Bennun and Peter Njoroge had colour-ringed 15 birds in the area in 1993). The four groups consisted of six, two, one (?) and six individuals, and included two juveniles (with grey irises, tawny flanks and fresh plumage). None of the 15 birds was ringed.

Details of the other sites searched are as follows.

Runyenjes - Thuchi River, Embu District

1. Thuchi River valley, 27/5/96, 10:00–11.30. A 4 km stretch searched, starting approximately half a kilometre upstream of the B6.
2. Kiguku Stream, 27/5/96, 12:00–13.30. A 3 km stretch, starting approximately 3 km upstream of the B6.
3. Gitwa River, 27/5/96, 13.45–15.00. A 3 km stretch, starting at the B6 and moving upstream.
4. Runyenjes, 27/5/96, 15.30–17.30. Searched the middle slopes of a deep, convoluted valley approximately 5 km north of Runyenjes town, along the B6.

Meru District

5. Muriri, 30/5/96, 09.00-18.00. The route followed an 8 km stretch of stream leading from the C91 into the northern slopes of the Nyambeni Hills, and then returned to the C91 3-4 km further east at the village of Muriri.
6. 10 km north of Meru, Nyambeni Range, 31/5/96, 11.00-15.00. Searched along two streams running south-east from the C91 for 4-5 km, starting at a point approximately 10 km north of Meru.

No Hinde's Babblers were recorded at any of these sites. Those sites within Embu District were similar to Kianyaga in terms of the availability of *Lantana* and other forms of cover, although they were generally more intensively managed, 'tidier' and at higher altitude. At Thuchi River a local farmer claimed to recognise the recorded calls, identifying the bird in Kiembu as *mathegethege*. Though he claimed that the bird had been common, or at least conspicuous in the area until a few years ago, it is possible that he may have mistaken Hinde's for the Northern Pied Babbler (*T. hypoleucus*). It is also quite likely that the name used is a generic one which applies to all babblers.

Of the Meru sites, site 5 was much drier than at Kianyaga. At site 6, which more closely resembled Kianyaga, four groups of Northern Pied Babblers were found.

Despite the short search, it seems likely that Hinde's Babblers were absent from these specific areas. The species was easily located at Kianyaga, and very responsive to playback. However, the results presented here are far from conclusive. The areas searched form a tiny portion of the apparently suitable habitat around the east and northern slopes of Mt. Kenya. At most, these results lend support to the view that Hinde's Babbler has disappeared from some areas within the northern part of its range. However, a more intensive search is required before any firm conclusions can be drawn. — *Phil Shaw, Scottish Natural Heritage, 2 Anderson Place, Edinburgh EH6 5NP, UK*

The Lanner and the Pratincole

My husband and I visited Amboseli National Park over Easter, from 3-6 April 1996. The park had enjoyed heavy rains and its barren aspect had changed to something resembling the emerald meadows of Europe. Grass grew thick and lush and long, a fact much appreciated by the huge congregation of elephants dotted across the plains just about as far as the eye could see. Enthralled by this spectacle, we sat in the car and watched the interaction of elephant family groups. Many adults had a long green-grass moustache hanging down on either side of their mouths as they munched happily away. Surely this must be one of

the last sights of a living paradise on earth, great creatures behaving as they have done for centuries without the fear of the poacher's gun or the hunter's trap. Another car joined us, coming from the opposite direction, and we elephant-watched for at least half an hour, until the other car drove off. At that moment all hell was let loose. Although I was watching, so quick and fierce was the action that I could hardly tell what was happening as a bird of prey fell from the sky onto a Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* that had been sitting unobserved by the roadside all this time. I suspect the moving car had put up the pratincole, although I cannot be sure of this, and it rose screeching into the sky closely pursued by a Lanner Falcon. The Lanner chased its prey for a few minutes, then, realising there was no hope of catching it, returned to the ground about 2 m away from our car. It stood motionless, with turned head, one eye gazing skywards on the still screaming pratincole. Then its gaze focused on something just beside our car, and we realised that there was another pratincole sitting there, frozen with fear. Neither bird moved, and we watched, for what seemed like an interminable time, hardly daring to breathe. The Lanner was in superb condition, a dashing, handsome bird, with a rich rufous crown, black spots almost glowing on his white thighs, the large eyes alert and unwavering. As the pratincole slightly eased its body off the ground the Lanner attacked. With a horrendous shriek of fear the Pratincole shot into the air, but once again the Lanner missed. The drama was over and we could breathe again.

As I had previously seen a flock of about 200 Collared Pratincoles resting and obligingly stretching their wings so that the chestnut underwing could be clearly seen, I assumed that the two being hunted were also Collared Pratincoles. A post-drama ruffling through the pages of bird books revealed that Lanners have been recorded using trains to flush their prey, so we wondered whether this Lanner had been using the cars to do the same thing. It certainly seemed like it — particularly as regards the first attack. — *Dorrie Brass, P O Box 16526, Nairobi.*

Northerly passage of Eurasian Rollers at Sable Valley

Until this year (1996) I had not been able to record the Eurasian Roller *Coracias garrulus* actually within Sable Valley Wildlife Sanctuary, despite having sighted it annually in the immediately adjacent neighbourhood.

However, in February I noted an individual hawking over some recently burned ground not far from my house, and was thus able to add it to the check-list without cheating. They were very abundant this year in the general area, which is devastated annually by uncontrolled burning thus providing choice pickings for the rollers.

In the darkening van of a rainstorm at 17:00 h on Monday 25 March I gradually became aware that the entire valley was alive with Eurasian Rollers. It was as though the area immediately below my house was some predetermined check-point: rollers were beaming in from all points south. Many took a few minutes to hawk over the various termite irruptions occurring in the valley, then were off again. The sky was virtually clouded with blue rollers heading off after pinpointing the Sable Valley turning-point, in flappy, deviating flight, generally into the north with a slight easterly bias. It was an incredible sight. This continued for more than half an hour and I estimated that many hundreds, if not thousands, passed.

A smallish, dark falcon with a facial mask whipped by among the rollers, but the light was too poor and he was too fast for identification.

Early the following morning a dozen stragglers passed over.

To witness this sudden, unequivocal rallying from all over the area and the subsequent positive northerly course set by the multitude renewed for me the incredible awe that bird migration continues to inspire in man's mind. Having avoided us in the past, what particular circumstance of climate or food supply determined that this year the northbound passage would follow this route? Presumably these birds would follow the littoral north and then take the Red Sea route to Siberia or the Balkans (assuming that Maghreb and Iberian birds are those which winter in West Africa, or follow the Nile and winter in Uganda).

Is there some acceptable, simple formula for counting airborne birds in multitudes?

I hope I am a check-point for the Rollers next year; it is exhilarating, exciting and beautiful, a unique ornithological experience. — *Fiona Alexander, Sable Valley Wildlife Sanctuary, P O Box 890, Ukunda*

[**Editors' note:** *Birds of Africa* provides a good description of the mass emigration of Eurasian Rollers along the East African coast. Flocks of birds like these rollers can be counted with the same estimation techniques as used during the waterbird counts: count a small block, perhaps ten birds, and use this mental picture to estimate the number in larger blocks. The most convenient block size depends on the size of the flock. With very large numbers overflying for a long time, landmarks can be used to help estimate the approximate rate of passage (e.g. number of birds per minute), and the duration of passage used to estimate total numbers.]

Black-Headed Heron devours Laughing Dove

Kenya Birds has published accounts of several unusual instances of birds eating other birds, or being eaten themselves (for instance, African Fish Eagle killing Lesser Flamingo at Lake Bogoria; Ground Hornbill attacking Pied Crow on the shores of Lake Nakuru (volume 1(1)), African Python crushing African Spoonbill (volume 2(1)). For some reason, most of these incidents seem to occur during the annual waterbird counts...

During the Nakuru waterbird counts held on 6 July 1996, Masinde, Kirathe, Njuguna and Kahindi twice saw Black-headed Herons killing Laughing Doves at the Nakuru Town Sewage Treatment Complex.

On the banks of a pond on the western side of the complex, we encountered a heron trying to swallow whole, not a rat, lizard or frog but — a Laughing Dove. As the team approached, the heron fled and abandoned its prey. It was clear that the heron had killed the dove: it was almost decapitated; most feathers on its head, neck and shoulders had come off, and fresh blood oozed from the keel.

The second episode happened an hour later as we drove along the eastern fence of the complex. Two herons stalked and killed a Laughing Dove among a mixed flock of birds (including Grey-headed Sparrows, Pin-tailed Whydahs, Red-billed Firefinches, Namaqua, Laughing and Ring-necked Doves) that was feeding along the edges of the tall grass. The flock scrambled to escape as the herons struck their quarry, but resumed feeding on the grass seeds a few seconds later. One heron commandeered the catch and declined to share it. Without the essential tearing tools possessed by raptors, the despotic heron managed to swallow the dove only after chopping it into bits with its sharp beak.

According to the literature, the Black-headed Heron mainly preys on lizards, amphibians and large insects found in open grasslands. In his profile about herons (volume 2(1)), Leon Bennun notes that "The Black-headed Heron... is not averse to taking the odd bird when circumstances allow".

I wonder how odd the Laughing Dove really is as a prey item for this species — it may be that Black-headed Herons take a lot more birds than is generally realised. — *Onesmas Kahindi, Friends of Conservation, P O Box 74901, Nairobi*

Earthwatch Fellowship to the Eastern Usambara Mountains, Tanzania

The Usambara Mountains exert a magnetic attraction for both birdwatchers and biogeographers. These mountains form part of the Eastern Arc chain, which appears to have supported forests all through the climatic ups and downs of the Pleistocene period. The Eastern Arc forests contain a staggering array of endemic

fauna and flora, and are one of the 14 most important and endangered biodiversity hotspots, worldwide.

In July 1996, David Ngala of the Forest Department, Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, and I were nominated by the East Africa Natural History Society to join an Earthwatch expedition to the Eastern Usambara mountains. We were to assist William Newmark with his research work. Dr Newmark has been studying the effects of forest fragmentation on forest understorey birds of these mountains for the last ten years. He has been able to prove that when forests become smaller they lose understorey birds, especially the forest specialists. His initial results have been used to design management plans for Amani Forest Reserve, which is in the East Usambaras. What he is now investigating is the mechanisms that lead to local extinction of understorey forest birds in forest fragments.

With a team of ten volunteers from all over the world (America, Japan, Cameroon & Kenya), and a diverse range of occupations ranging from computer operators to biologists, we helped to collect data of various sorts over the fortnight. In general, we mist-netted birds, collected and sorted leaf litter insects and measured temperature, light and humidity at different points in the forest.

Common species in the nets included Olive Sunbird, Cabanis's Greenbul *Phyllastrephus cabanisi* and Stripe-cheeked Greenbul. At a few sites we caught Sharpe's Akalat *Sheppardia sharpei* and White-chested Alethe *Alethe fuelleborni*, both Eastern Arc endemics.

Long-billed Apalis *Apalis moreaui*, a critically threatened species, was heard on various occasions near a stream close to our campsite. Unfortunately we never managed to see it. According to Bill Newmark, this is one of the few places where it can reliably be found.

The endemic Usambara Eagle Owl *Bubo vosseleri* was heard on several nights, and David Ngala (who has a special interest in owls!) was able to follow it one night till dawn. Unfortunately the rest of the team did not manage to see it, because by the time David had located it during the day, which took him a while, it detected our presence in one way or another and flew away.

I have never seen as many Silvery-cheeked Hornbills as in the Usambaras. At one time we watched a flock of more than 300 birds from a hill-top viewpoint, as they soared and displayed in the early evening. The hornbills spent the day feeding in plantations of *Maesopsis emini* where the trees were in heavy fruit.

As well as being a learning experience, the Fellowship provided a great opportunity to meet people of different cultures and backgrounds, and form friendships that are likely to last long beyond the two weeks. — *Edward Waiyaki, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Threatened birds of Kenya 8: Papyrus Yellow Warbler

Leon Bennun
P O Box 40658, Nairobi

The Papyrus Yellow Warbler, *Chloropeta gracilirostris*, is the most severely threatened bird in a highly threatened habitat — swamps. Kenya's wetlands, like its forests and moist grasslands, are suffering a relentless assault in the face of a rapidly expanding population. Papyrus swamps have enormous ecological value. They help in flood control and water purification and provide fish spawning grounds, to mention just a few. Yet the extensive swamps that once bordered Lake Victoria, especially at the mouths of major rivers, have been and are being drained, cut, cultivated and destroyed — a process often perversely encouraged by Government policy.

The Papyrus Yellow Warbler has a strange, patchy and fragmented distribution. In Kenya the nominate race (i.e. *C. g. gracilirostris*) is known from papyrus swamps at Kendu Bay, Kisumu, Lake Kanyaboli and Yala Swamp. It skips over to the western Rift at Lakes Edward, George, Bunyoni and Mutanda, and swamps in the Virunga Volcanoes. Its stronghold, perhaps, is in Rwanda and Burundi, where it is found in a number of swamps scattered across both countries. Another race, *bensoni*, has been described from the mouth of the Luapulu River on Lake Mweru, at the border of Zaïre and Zambia. In most places it is a scarce bird; the few sites where it occurs in high densities are themselves very small, so overall populations must be low.

No prizes for guessing the favourite habitat of this species — dense papyrus swamps. In parts of its range it does occur in other types of swamps as well, but only in the wettest and highest places. Indeed, it appears to be more abundant generally at higher altitudes and in high rainfall areas. One suggestion is that it may compete with the African Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus baeticatus*, which seems to like lower altitudes and less rain. The two species hardly overlap in Rwanda and Burundi, although they certainly do in Kenya.

Papyrus Yellow Warblers spend much of their time hopping about low down between papyrus stems like a swamp or reed warbler, searching for tiny insects. As befits a bird that has to grapple with papyrus daily, they have exceptionally long, strong toes and claws. For some reason they do not seem nearly as vocal as their relatives, the Dark-capped Yellow Warbler *C. natalensis* and Mountain Yellow Warbler *C. similis*, and no-one appears to have made a good recording of their song. Zimmerman, Turner and Pearson describe it as "a short series of notes, *to-tslo-wee* or *trslo-tschlee-wo*".

A recent survey of papyrus swamps on the Kenyan shores of Lake Victoria revealed not a single Papyrus Yellow Warbler. However, it seems likely that the birds are easy to overlook — especially given how difficult it is to penetrate right into the papyrus beds. The swamps just south of Kisumu are supposed to be a good site for this species, despite much habitat destruction: according to Brian Finch, an early-morning boat ride along the papyrus edge will usually yield two or three individuals.

A rare and patchy species like this one is inevitably at severe risk from habitat destruction. Its prospects in Kenya do not look good, on present trends, and many of its sites in Rwanda and Burundi are apparently under serious threat as well. Papyrus contains a whole suite of birds specially adapted for this habitat. Although most are commoner and more widespread than this one, all are in danger if swamp destruction continues unchecked. We badly need more information on the distribution, populations, ecology and behaviour of the Papyrus Yellow Warbler in Kenya — but moves to save the papyrus can't wait until this research has been carried out. By that time there may be no Papyrus Yellow Warblers left to study.

Birding in and around Kisumu

Jeam Agutu
Maseno School, P O Box 120, Maseno

The Kisumu area is probably one of Kenya's most under-rated birding destinations. With a wide diversity of habitats, and many species that are hard to see elsewhere in the country, Kisumu deserves to be much more frequently visited.

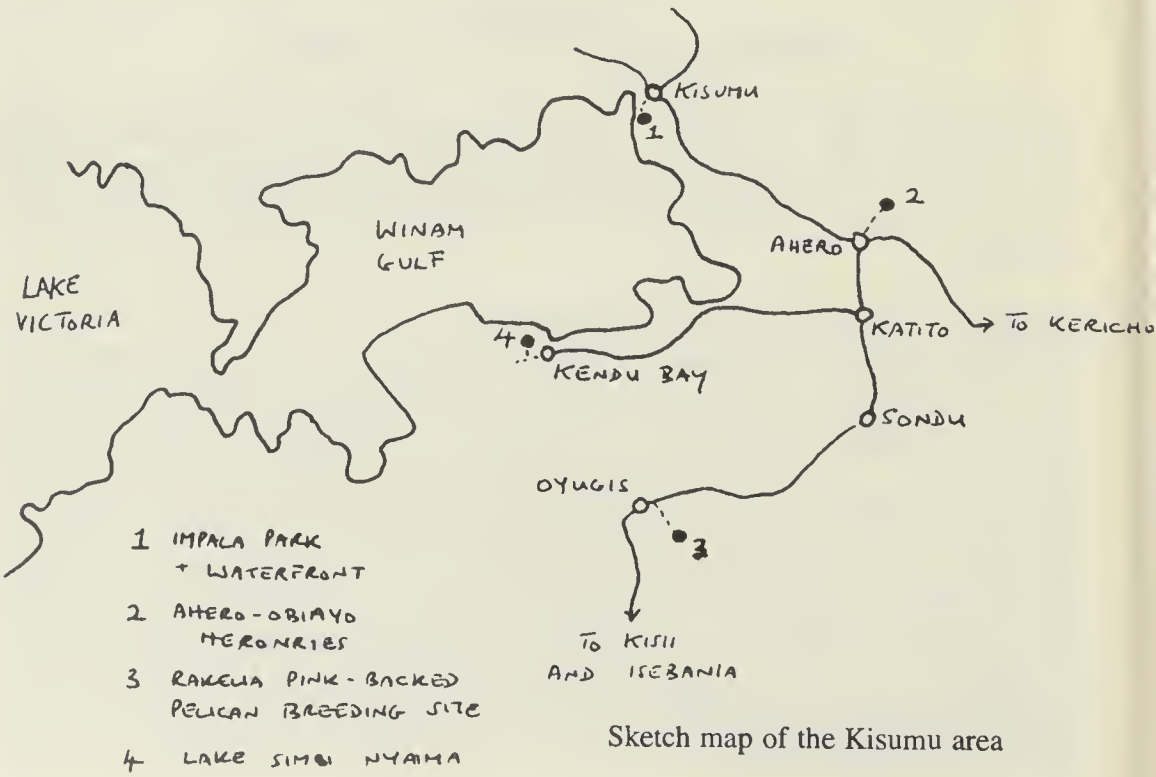
Impala Park and the Kisumu waterfront

Three kilometres from the town centre is Kisumu's Impala Park. As well as providing grazing grounds for the lake's hippos and a holding point for captured 'problem' animals like baboons and leopards, it is home to many interesting birds. The park may look dry and desolate at first, but listen and you will detect the distant but distinct cooing of the Blue-spotted Wood Dove, the harsh scolding squawks of Brown Parrots, the sudden duet of the spectacular but skulking Black-headed Gonoleks, the unceasing twittering of nesting Yellow-backed Weavers and perhaps the startled escape of a flushed Harlequin Quail. Early morning birders will be treated to the familiar and nostalgic call of a pair of African Fish Eagles perched on a tree that they share with hundreds of Long-tailed and Great Cormorants.

Several scavengers and birds of prey are attracted by easy pickings among the urban debris (and the relatively high population of rodents), along with convenient nesting opportunities. Marabou Storks, Long-crested Eagles and Black-shouldered and Black Kites are usually in evidence. Rüppell's Starlings are numerous, while the trees are home to Spotted-flanked and Double-toothed Barbets.

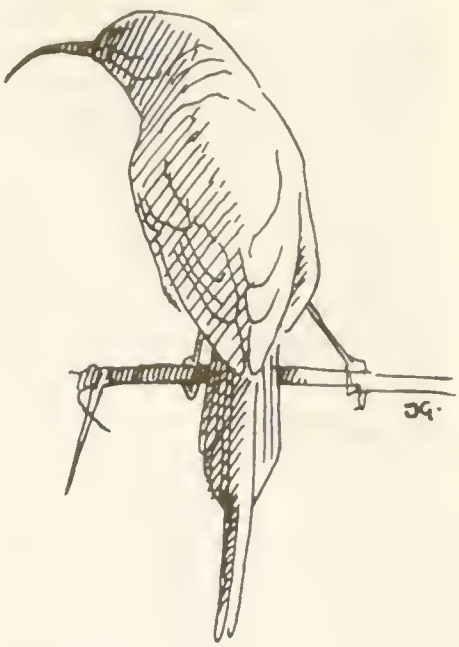
The waterfront, which the park shares with the Sunset Hotel, Kisumu Yacht-Club, Hippo Point and Dunga Refreshments, is a 5 km stretch of dense papyrus beds and associated vegetation. It can be accessed at any of these places. Look out for the shy Rufous-bellied Heron, Black Crake, Swamp Flycatcher, Red-chested Sunbird and the gregarious but elusive Northern Brown-throated Weaver. You may also be lucky enough to see two of Lake Victoria's papyrus endemics, the Papyrus Gonolek and Carruther's Cisticola. Both are becoming rarer at Kisumu as the papyrus beds are cleared and destroyed. The Papyrus Canary and Papyrus Yellow Warbler also occur, but are hard to find from the shore. The best way to see them is probably to hire a boat at Dunga for an early morning ride southwards along the edge of the papyrus.

How to get there. Kisumu is 350 km from Nairobi via Nakuru and Kericho. The main road joins Kisumu's Jomo Kenyatta Highway at the Jubilee Market roundabout. Turn



Sketch map of the Kisumu area

left here, continuing on through the town centre and finally making a right turn onto Aput Lane, signposted for the Sunset Hotel and Nyanza Club. A murram road some 20 m from the Sunset Hotel entrance leads you to the Impala Park. To reach the Yacht-Club, Hippo Point and Dunga, continue past the Sunset turnoff and turn right at the T-junction onto the lake-shore road.



Red-chested Sunbird — *John Gale*

The Ahero heronries

The National Irrigation Board rice paddies at Ahero are an isolated permanent wetland, off the main road to Kericho, around 15 minutes drive from Kisumu. This is an ideal site to begin or end your bird 'safari' to western Kenya. Close to a thousand large waterbirds of 37 species have been recorded here. Ten species, including Great and Long-tailed Cormorant, Cattle, Little, Yellow-billed and Great Egret, Black-headed Heron, Open-billed Stork, Sacred Ibis and African Spoonbill, breed at the nearby Ahero-Obiayo heronries.

The lush green rice fields and marshy dykes swarm with birdlife, especially during the long rains of March to May, when both man and bird spend every available minute of daylight within the wetland. A telescope is handy if you don't feel like trudging through the rice paddies: look out for Common Squacco Heron, Glossy Ibis, Fulvous Whistling Duck, Knob-billed Duck, African Marsh Harrier and (at the right time of year) Common Snipe. During the northern winter, check for Little Stint among the large flocks of Ruff; Black-tailed Godwits are usually not far away either. Four species of plovers occur — migrant Ringed and resident Long-toed, Spur-winged and Crowned.

The heronries themselves are in a band of trees fringing the wetlands in the village of Obiayo. Hundreds of waterbirds breed here during the long rains every year, continuing through to August and September: an exciting spectacle for birders but one that is little appreciated by the local people, who have to contend with the associated noise, mess and stink. The Lake Victoria Wetlands Team is working with BirdLife Kenya to try and harmonise the needs of the people and the birds, and encourages birders to visit the site.

How to get there. Ahero is about 16 km south-east of Kisumu. If travelling from Nairobi, turn right onto the murram road signposted "N.I.B. — Western Kenya Rice

Growing Scheme', situated immediately beyond the river bridge past the Esso petrol station and noisy 'matatu' stage at Ahero market. Two kilometres on, vast rice fields teeming with waterbirds appear. Ahead of you, some five minutes walk, is the village and primary school of Obiayo, where the heronries are located. Vehicles can be parked at the Esso or Total petrol stations on request.

The Rakewa Pink-backed Pelican breeding site

If you have a little time to spare, you may want to visit this unusual pelican breeding colony 60 km south of Kisumu. The colony is in a grove of fig trees at the springs that give rise to the Rakewa river. For many centuries it has been given protection by the local people. Sadly, over the last few years many of the trees formerly used by the birds have been felled. Nevertheless, a hundred or more pairs of pelicans still breed here each long rainy season, building their stick nests alongside those of Black-headed Herons and Great Egrets.

Little Egret — *John Gale*

Grey Crowned Cranes hide their nests within the dense aquatic vegetation that fringes and floats on the Rakewa river, also home to Moorhen and Black Crake. Isolated patches of open grass conceal a variety of seed-eating birds, including African Firefinch, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, Purple Grenadier, Bronze Mannikin and flocks of Pin-tailed Whydahs. As you thread your way through the thick bush lining the Rakewa river valley, watch out for Harlequin Quail flying up underfoot, and Yellow-throated Longclaw. During a recent visit we were bidden farewell by three shrikes at once — the sweet, plaintive song of the Fiscal, the low piping whistle of the Sulphur-breasted Bush Shrike and best of all, the clear, bell-like notes of the Black-headed Tchagra.

As at Ahero, the Lake Victoria Wetlands Team is promoting the conservation of this important breeding colony and encourages birders to visit.

How to get there. The site is reached via Katitu and Sondu. The easiest route is to take the Ahero-Isebania A1 (turn-off 2 km from Ahero towards Kericho) as far as Oyugis town. One kilometre before the sprawling 'matatu' park at Oyugis is a left turn onto a murram road signposted to Nyamira. The breeding site is 3 km further on, easily recognised by the two large fig trees appearing amidst cultivated fields of maize, cassava and sugar cane.

Lake Simbi Nyaima

Very little was known about the mysterious Lake Simbi Nyaima until the recent appearance of hundreds of flamingos pushed the wetland belatedly into the media spotlight. This attention was well deserved, because the lake is an interesting site with a good diversity of waterbirds — even leaving aside the mixed company of Greater and Lesser Flamingos.

Large numbers of adult and immature Black-winged Stilts, Pied Avocets, Wood and Marsh Sandpipers, Little Stints, Hamerkops, Hadada and Sacred Ibis stalk their prey on the lake's grass-covered shore or murky alkaline waters. It is worth making the easy 45-minute walk around the 5 km^2 crater lake, which will turn up a variety of terrestrial birds including Bare-faced Go-away Bird, White-browed Coucals and assorted waxbill species. The steep sides of the crater are dotted with the nest holes of Pied Kingfishers and Little Bee-eaters.

How to get there. Lake Simbi is about 70 km south of Kisumu via Ahero, Katitu and Kendu Bay. The easiest route is to take the Ahero-Isabania A1 (turn-off 2 km from Ahero towards Kericho). After 13 km there is a right turn onto the Katito-Homa Bay C19. This tarmac road ends abruptly at Kendu Bay, a small dusty market town also served by three Lake Victoria ferries (MV Alestes, Reli and Tilapia). A ferry departs from the Kisumu jetty at 09:00 each morning from Tuesday to Sunday, arriving two hours later at Kendu Bay.

Driving southwards for around 2 km from Kendu Bay (20 minutes walk) brings you to the Kanyadhiang' bridge. Turn right here onto a small dirt road, and a short drive or a further 10 minute walk brings you to the crater lake.

Book review

Birds of Kenya and northern Tanzania, by Dale A. Zimmerman, Donald A. Turner & David J. Pearson. Russel Friedman books, 740 pp., 124 colour and 19 b&w plates.

According to the poet Keats, who knew about these matters, a thing of beauty is a joy for ever. For those lucky enough to possess it, this splendid book is likely to be a joy, if not perhaps for ever, then for as long as can reasonably be expected in this changing world. East African birders, rendered gasping and parched by a 30-year drought of field guides, might be expected to fall upon almost any new bird book with the enthusiasm of the seriously dehydrated for a sparkling pool of spring water.

When the spring turns out actually to be bubbling with vintage champagne, the whole experience is likely to go a little to one's head.

Well: before proceeding, let sober calm return. And appropriately so, since this is a very serious-minded book, the foster child of silence and slow time, a whole eleven years in the making, dedicated to the memories of no lesser luminaries than Sir Frederick John Jackson, Victor Gurner Logan van Someren and Reginald E. Moreau, and catering to "serious observers" of the region's avifauna.

Unremitting seriousness might sound tiresome, but in this case it is, I believe, an excellent thing. This book succeeds so brilliantly because it tries to do things properly and takes no short cuts. Essentially, it is a field handbook to the 1,114 birds found in Kenya and northern Tanzania, south to 5°30' S and west to about the longitude of Mwanza. This area includes the Tanzanian national parks that are most popular with visitors. No doubt the boundaries were dictated largely by commercial concerns, but they make biogeographical sense as well — apart from the intrusion of the Usambara Mountains, with its special 'eastern Arc' forest birds, the avifaunas of northern Tanzania and southern Kenya have a great deal in common.

Perhaps 'footbook' would be a better term for this size of a text. Although the authors expressly state that it is intended for use in the field, anyone lugging this hefty tome about with them will develop a Schwarzenneger-like physique, or alternatively a hernia. But (as Keats never seems to have said) there's no such thing as a free lunch. If you want the information, you have to put up with the size and weight. The construction is robust enough to take some field wear and tear, particularly if you add one of the tough protective covers already being manufactured by various local companies. I imagine I will end up taking my own copy into the field, but (having no body-building ambitions) keeping it for handy end-of-day reference in a car or tent.

So what does all this bulk consist of? The text begins with a concise but useful introduction, explaining the layout of the book, giving a helpful guide to the region and its habitats, general tips on finding and identifying birds and a very clear and comprehensive glossary (an important feature, since the text makes no concession to lack of technical knowledge). There is a fine set of black and white habitat photographs, the best I have seen in any book on East Africa.

Then come the colour plates themselves. Seventy-nine of these are by Dale Zimmerman, a gigantic piece of work. Sadly, eye problems meant that Zimmerman could not complete the set, and Ian Willis and H. Douglas Pratt were drafted in to finish off the remaining 45 plates. Collectively, these illustrations are not only a staggering improvement on what has been available for the region in the past — they are world class, able to hold their own against any. Design and layout have been done with great care, balancing aesthetic considerations with the constraints of a field-guide format. There is free use of partial portraits, overlapped illustrations and scaled-down flight figures to show off distinctive features and plumages. A large number of

"poorly known and less commonly seen adult and subadult plumages", many never illustrated before, have been included — needless to say, this is enormously helpful.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the plates is their exceptional accuracy and attention to detail. Although the Introduction warns about shifting colours, for once the printers seem to have done the artists justice (the top-quality paper undoubtedly helps). This is especially impressive for some of the more subtly-coloured species. I had almost despaired of ever seeing an accurately printed plate of pycnonotids, but number 76 in this book has greenbuls to *die* for. Wonderful.

Superlatives do not apply everywhere. All the passerine plates are Dale Zimmerman's, and most of these are excellent. Even so, I find some of his birds a touch too reptilian (for want of a better word) for my taste — all claws and beaks and beady eyes. There has already been muttering from colleagues about the legs of some species, which often seem excessively spindly and 'stuck-on' at odd angles. The glossy starlings, while accurate enough (and I guess that's what counts) are distinctly *odd*. I'm not sure I'd like to encounter any of them on a dark night, even the innocent-looking but apparently free-falling Rüppell's Long-tailed. Zimmerman's non-passerine plates, painted later than the others, are a mixed bag — I thought the swifts and bustards just about adequate, for instance, whereas the coucals and large plovers are much more impressive.

The plates by Willis and Pratt, mainly waterbirds and raptors, range from good to very good. There are a few surprising omissions — almost no ducks in flight, disappointingly little on winter-plumage terns — but in a sense these illustrations are less important. Excellent depictions of most of these groups (though not, perhaps, the wintering terns) can already be found in South African and European field guides, and in *The Birds of Africa*.

Opposite each plate are short notes for each species, concisely giving status, distribution and key identification features, as well as a page number reference for the main text. Following this up leads to a compact but detailed species account. The descriptions are clear and comprehensive, where appropriate giving details for different races and plumages; key identification features are helpfully italicised. Sections on voice, habits, similar species and status and distribution complete each account. There is a small but accurate and useful distribution map for each species, with breeding and non-breeding ranges distinguished — though it might have helped to have a few more points to orient oneself by (only the two main east-flowing rivers are shown). Overall, these accounts are models of their type, and contain a huge amount of information. Even if you can identify a bird straight away from its illustration, you will learn a great deal from reading the text.

A descriptive account at the beginning of each bird family gives general information on its characteristics, taxonomy, habits, status in the region and identification. Other nice touches are the detailed treatment of cisticola identification, comparative wing outlines of some difficult species (in case you have them in the

hand) and a scattering of line drawings illustrating particular points. I particularly liked the pages describing and illustrating typical nests of different weaver species, though these are unfortunately not cross-referenced to the text.

Taxonomy and nomenclature follow the new East African list, and are thus completely up to date. Some names will be new and unfamiliar to many readers. Alternative English names are given where they are in common use, and the indexes are well constructed and will help. One really new and helpful feature of the book, at least for the "serious observer", is its thorough treatment of sub-species, giving clear descriptions of plumage differences and ranges.

I have a few minor quibbles. The maps in the Introduction are rather small and confusing. It would have been clearer to show the actual features that the numbers on each map refer to (though the map on the frontispiece has just about everything on it anyway). It seems a pity that the species only found in northern Tanzania have been shunted off into exile on the last three plates, a decision that pays respect to political rather than biogeographic boundaries. Presumably the authors decided to include this area when it was too late to alter the other plates. It would have been good to see some information on local ornithological societies and institutions, especially for those who might want to report unusual or interesting records. The text is generally very accurate; after an intensive search I did manage to find a couple of tiny errors (on page 569, "compared above" should be "compared below", for example) but these really are entirely trivial.

This is an expensive book, but worth every shilling. It is actually very good value for money. Unfortunately, the high price will clearly put the text out of reach for many young, aspiring birders. Perhaps ways can be found to make it accessible to the wide audience that it deserves.

It should be clear by now that any "serious observer" will want to rush out and buy this book. Is it also a book for beginners, or those who take just a mild interest in birding? I think the answer is definitely 'yes': this will be an essential text whatever the level of your knowledge or expertise. The design makes it easy to access the illustrations and the key identification features, while a wealth of more detailed information is available for those who require it. Anyone using this book, at whatever level, will find it a source of valuable and pleasurable instruction.

This text puts Kenyan ornithology on a solid footing for the next millennium. It is a highly unusual and dazzlingly successful combination of meticulous science, artistic flair and vast field experience, the distillation of not one but three lifetimes in ornithology. All of us who care about the region's birds owe grateful thanks to Dale, Don and David. We are remarkably lucky. — *Leon Bennun, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

[**Editors' note:** We thank *Swara* magazine, where a version of this review first appeared, for permission to reprint it.]

Events and Announcements

Wednesday Morning Bird Walks led by Fleur Ng'weno and Damaris Rotich continue weekly. Meet at 8:45 am at the National Museums entrance for a walk in the Nairobi area. These walks are for EANHS members: non-members are welcome but requested to join the Society (see below).

The East Africa Natural History Society offers lectures, excursions and publications with a strong bird focus and organises ringing and nest record schemes in Eastern Africa. For membership details: tel. 749957, or write to the Hon. Secretary, EANHS, P O Box 44486 Nairobi. The office at the National Museums of Kenya is open each weekday 09:30 to 16:00 (closed Friday afternoon).

For sale in the EANHS office: **NEW!! Birds of Kenya and northern Tanzania**, by Zimmerman, Turner and Pearson — very special members' price KSh 2950/=. Also the **stunning new BirdLife Kenya T-shirt**, 'I'd rather be birding' stickers, plus books, cards, posters...

National Birdmap. The Ornithology Department's biogeographic database needs YOUR bird records!! For your free National Birdmap checklists, contact Colin Jackson.

Birding Hotline! Feeling twitchy? The EANHS is running an experimental birding info service. Phone on Nairobi 749957 for the latest on what's been seen where — and to report any unusual records.

Scopus, the lively regional journal of ornithology, is published three times a year by the EANHS Ornithological Sub-committee. Contact Don Turner, P O Box 48019, Nairobi, Kenya (tel. Nairobi 48133). Annual subscription KSh 600 (KSh 650 up-country); write for overseas rates. Records are welcomed from the East African Bird Report which forms the third issue of *Scopus* each year.

African Bird Club. The ABC produces an excellent colour Bulletin and provides a worldwide focus for African ornithology. For membership details, write to: African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Rd., Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK. Membership presently costs UK £12 per year.

EANHS Nest Record Card Scheme. For information and cards, contact the acting Nest Record Scheme Organiser, Colin Jackson, at the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya (address below).

Contacts: For *Kenya Birds*, write to the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi, or telephone 742131/61, extension 243. For BirdLife Kenya, telephone Nairobi 749957; fax 741049.

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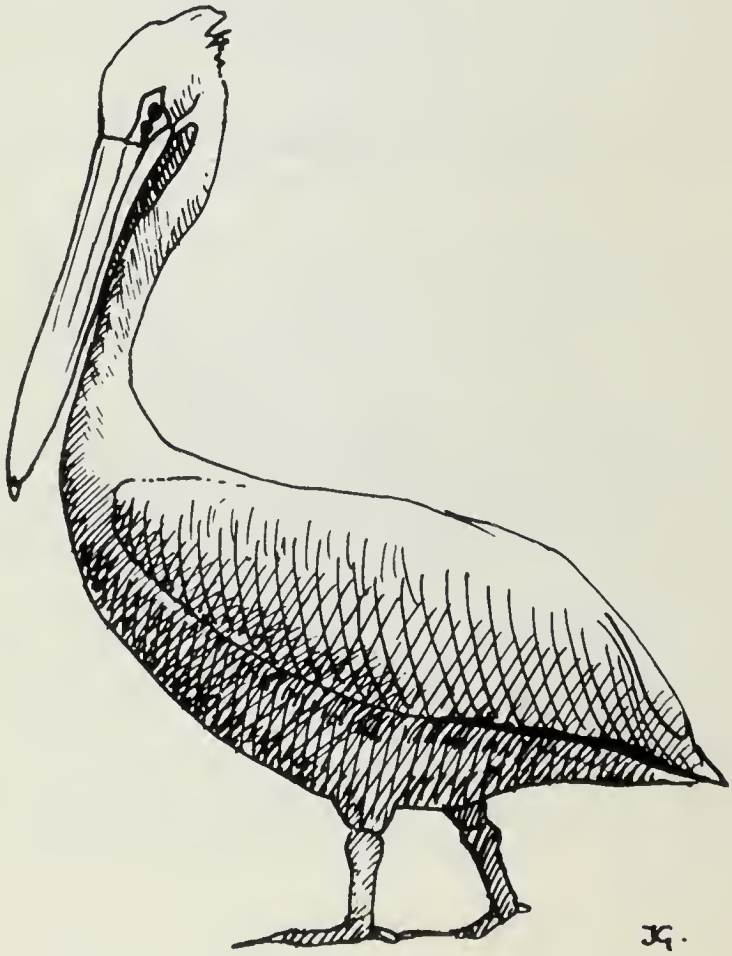

Pink-backed Pelican — *John Gale*